The whole story.. 'authoring - the active, constructive role of the mind in perception' [Bakhtin]

D'Arcy, Pat

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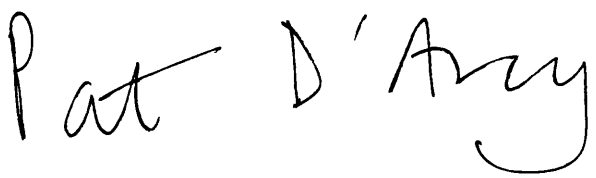
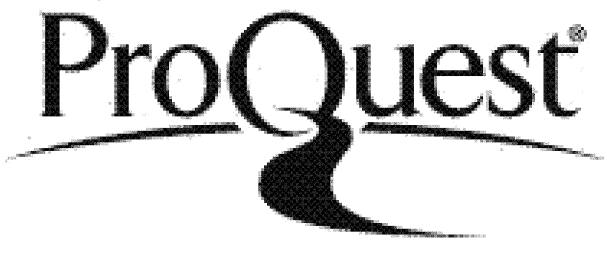
THE WHOLE STORY...

'AUTHORING - THE ACTIVE, CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE OF THE MIND IN PERCEPTION' [Bakhtin]

'WHAT IS KNOWN MUST IN FACT BE BROUGHT TO LIFE AFRESH WITHIN EVERY KNOWER BY HER OWN EFFORTS.'
[The Bullock Report]

Signed: 



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Abstract

The Whole Story...

In this thesis I investigate the nature of written responses made to stories in an educational context, which can be characterised as aesthetic transactions with a text [Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978, 1985]. My research develops Guidelines designed to elicit such personally meaningful responses from teachers to pupils' stories as well as from pupils to the stories they read. I map those features which characterise the engaged and appreciative responses that I both made and received from primary and secondary teachers and consider in what respects they may be educationally valuable. I also consider how such responses could offer a form of meaning-related, interpretive assessment for the work of pupils as story writers and story readers.

This thesis also tells the story of my journey as an educational researcher. It acknowledges the mistakes I made, the confusions I grappled with and what I discovered in the course of my investigation about myself as an educator and about the values that underpin my thinking which sustained the whole enterprise.

I offer this thesis, therefore as an original contribution to the nature of engaged and appreciative responses made by teachers as well as by pupils in the field of story writing and story reading.

I offer it as an original contribution to the educational value of such responses as a form of interpretive assessment in the context of classroom teaching and external examining.

I also offer it as an original contribution to educational knowledge - the process of 'coming to know' - as I have sought to construct my developing perceptions as a living educational theory.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank most warmly all the teachers and the pupils who made this research possible. I am grateful for the time they gave under the pressure of already over-crowded work schedules.

Secondly, I want to thank those colleagues who kept me company and gave support as my enquiry progressed, by reading and commenting on drafts and chapters as they emerged. In particular, I am grateful to Barbara MacKay, (formerly at Concordia University, Montreal), Nancy Martin (formerly at the London Institute of Education) and Pat Smyth, (formerly at the University of Bristol School of Education). They were all unstintingly generous with their time.

Last but not least, I want to thank my supervisor, Jack Whitehead, who persuaded me that I had my own personally meaningful story to tell about my journey as an educational action researcher.

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Fonts

Just a word of explanation about the different fonts and other graphical distinctions that I have used in my thesis for different strands of the enquiry:

I have used **Helvetica** for the main body of the thesis - ie. my own investigative account.

I have used **Courier** for the pupils' stories and for all the written responses to stories made by teachers, pupils and by me.

I have used ***Nadianne*** for all the oral comments made by teachers, pupils and by me.

I have used **New Century Schoolbook** for excerpts from the work of other writers and indented these to make it clear that they are quotations.

I have used **Bookman** for the Guidelines which I formulated and for excerpts from documents such as Key Stage Mark Schemes.

I have used quotation marks for all indented references to the work of other writers and for single words or phrases from other sources where these are incorporated in the main text. Otherwise I have mainly relied on the different fonts to indicate the source.

The Whole Story ...

Contents

Foreword

I can only write this foreword which in actual fact is looking back, now that my journey, at least for the moment, is almost complete. But I want to place it at the beginning rather than the end because I hope that it will offer readers, before their own journey through my thesis begins, some pointers to the directions in which my enquiry led me and some suggestions about how my account of it might be read.

A moving viewpoint

I borrow this metaphor from Iser [1978] because the focus of my enquiry and also the way in which I have chosen to present it shifts in one respect from stories, to teacher-readers, to pupil-writers (and later, pupil-readers) and in another respect from the written responses that I both made and received, to discussions with participating teachers and fellow action researchers, to encounters with the work of response theorists and teacher educators and finally to current forms of external assessment. Between them, these viewpoints offer a variety of perspectives on the central issue: what characterises a personally meaningful response to a story and in what respects can such responses be said to have educational value?

Stories and the meanings they offer

When I started out, my initial concern was for the ***stories*** that pupils were writing and for the ways in which required forms of assessment [D.E.S. 1990] were failing to pay any attention to the unique meanings that each of these stories offered to their readers. I was indignant that their content and their effect upon the reader should be disregarded as though what they were about was of little value. Only the generalisable 'evidence' of what these stories revealed with respect to the writer's knowledge of narrative

construction or her secretarial skills was to be taken into account.

I chose to focus on responses to stories rather than any other form of writing because from being a small child I have derived enormous pleasure from the unique qualities that stories *individually* possess. I think back to my father reading to us at bedtime about the magical worlds inhabited by Una and the Red Cross Knight or Alice in her Wonderland and images from what I 'made' of both those stories and many many others, remain with me still. The images that I evoked inside my head as I listened, still resonate as I call them once more to mind. I was a lover of the virtual reality that stories offer long before the advent of computerised technologies!

Then later, when I was teaching 'literature' for external examinations, it was still that sharing of what each of us made in our minds as we read (for instance) *Lord of the Flies* or *To Kill A Mocking Bird* or *The Go-Between* that brought each of those novels alive and rendered each of them meaningful. We took those story worlds into which we entered seriously, as we discussed the rights and wrongs of the behaviour of the characters, what we thought and felt about what happened and how we envisaged it.

Readers as meaning makers

Of course, I quickly came to realise that without ***a reader*** who is willing to become involved, a story cannot become meaningful. That is why my research took me to the reader-response theorists and in particular to the work of Louise Rosenblatt. The distinction that she draws between aesthetic and efferent readings of a text became increasingly relevant as I sought to explore the ways in which aesthetic readings of pupils' stories, and later of pupils' own responses as story readers could offer a way of assessing their

work *interpretively* .

Pupils as meaning makers

But in an educational context, it is not only the *story* and *the teacher as the reader* of the story that matters. Behind the stories that they write and the stories which they read there is ***the meaning-making mind of the pupil*** writer/reader.

In the course of this enquiry, I have come to perceive more clearly that it is the fostering and the encouragement of those minds, giving pupils confidence in their own meaning-making capacities that is of foremost educational importance. In reducing their stories to objects for analysis, current forms of assessment similarly reduce their writers to objects for analysis as they focus on skills at the expense of a pupil's thoughts, feelings and imaginative impressions.

I believe that is why Andy, an experienced marker for GCSE English and English Literature, said at one of our meetings:

The reasons I find it difficult to come to terms with story-writing is because of the way it's assessed. That's the problem - in terms of the National Curriculum, GCSE and every examiners' meeting I've ever been to, the problem with story writing for kids in school - for people who assess kids' writing is the very assessment of it.

I have been asked whether my research is principally about how to improve the stories that pupils write through the engaged and appreciative responses that we can make as teachers to the stories that they have already written. My reply is that hopefully, that could be the case, if their confidence as story writers increases. I also hope, through the aesthetic

responses to pupils' own stories which we can make as experienced readers, that their capacity to respond similarly to the texts of other authors would consequently increase.

But for me, principally, it is what those responses offer to pupils as ***carefully explicit recognitions of their current achievements as makers of meaning*** that is, in itself, of educational value. Through the experience of once more becoming a supervised student during the production of this thesis, I have come to realise vividly just how frustrating what I have come to typify as the 'Yes, but...' attitude of a conscientious teacher can be! Someone who is always looking forward, as a reader, to what can be accomplished next, apparently paying scant attention to whatever the writer has already expressed.

In a comment on her doctoral thesis [1998] Terri Austin writes:

> 'The child is an author who has the courage to put thoughts on paper. It takes courage to write. It takes more courage to honestly write about heartfelt topics. I think we need to remember this act of courage and take it into consideration when we respond.'

Some observations that one of my own pupils made some years ago come back to me. Michael wrote:

> 'Years ago I regarded writing to be a very boring and dreaded job.... Whenever the word writing was mentioned I automatically gave a sigh of dismay because my interpretation of the word meant that a laborious and uninteresting duty was to follow. ...
> It was only around the age of fourteen when I developed a mind of my own, that I really discovered the true value of writing and my interpretation of the word then completely altered. ... I found that I needed to express what I felt; I

could not let my thoughts remain enclosed. My writing gave me what I needed so much: a way of expressing myself.'

Of course helping pupils to develop their competencies as writers and as readers has to be part of any English teacher's agenda but one of the directions in which this enquiry leads with regard to performance and the assessment of performance is that of demonstrating to pupils what they have already achieved through their own meaning-making capacities. I believe that it is educationally important to have a respect for the minds which lie behind those words on the page; we should listen carefully to what they have to say, as well as considering what we would like them to have said.

The interpretive assessment of story writing and story reading

Rosenblatt [1985] distinguishes between two ways of reading a text as follows:

> 'The difference between these kinds of reading lies... in what a reader does, where he or she turns his or her attention during the transactions with the text.
>
> In an *efferent* reading, the reader's attention is centred on what should be retained as a residue after the actual reading event - eg. the information to be acquired.... The reader's interest is focused mainly on what is to be taken away from the transaction.
>
> In an *aesthetic* transaction the reader's attention is focused on what he is living through during the reading event. He is attending both to what the verbal signals designate and to *the qualitative overtones* of the ideas, images, situations and characters that he is evoking under the guidance of the text. The literary work of art comes into being through the reader's attention to what the text *activates within him.*'
>
> [my italics] [p.37- 38]

As I continued with my enquiry, I came to see more clearly how responses which engage a reader *experientially* in a story, could offer a form of interpretive assessment on the part of teachers and examiners which retained a meaning-related approach to the particularities of a story written by a pupil or to what a pupil 'made' of the story of another author.

Unfortunately, opportunities for story writing and story reading in the curriculum have been seriously reduced and where they do exist in our current system of tests and examinations, criteria for their assessment are predominantly efferent. There is room for some change here and I hope that my enquiry will help to persuade others that both these activities deserve serious classroom time - and an interpretive response from teachers and assessors.

Constructing my own living educational theory

It may be that my concept of what a living educational theory involves differs in some respects from the way that others conceive it, in particular McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead [1996] and my fellow action researchers at the University of Bath who have constructed and accounted for their own living educational theories in the enquiries which they have undertaken [Walton, 1993; Eames, 1996; Holley, 1997; Laidlaw, 1997;].

I want to explain, therefore, what the term means to me as I offer my thesis as an original contribution to educational knowledge. My living educational theory as it is expressed in this enquiry, is embedded in the particularities of the journey that I have made. It cannot be separated from the stories to which I have responded or from my conversations with pupils, teachers and

fellow researchers or from my encounters with the work of reader-response theorists and other teacher educators.

In a wider and perhaps deeper sense, as I have gradually come to realise, my living educational theory is embedded in the whole of my life, in my experiences as a student, a teacher, an English Adviser and in the values which have underpinned and informed all those experiences. My understandings as an educator and now as an educational action researcher are continually open to extension and clarification through the particularities of my own life.

There has been a growth of interest in the past two decades in the potential that narrative has as a form of presentation for educational researchers because it allows for the 'I' to become an integral part of the enquiry and of the subsequent account: Krall, [1988]; Carter, [1993]; Ely and Whitehead, [1993]; Witherell and Noddings [1994]. I have chosen to call my thesis *The Whole Story...* for the same reasons and because as a living educational theory, it is still unfinished, with more, I hope, to come.

How do I hope this narrative will be read?

Stables [1996] suggests that:

> 'One of the advantages of developing educational research beyond its original empirical positivist tradition has been a broadening of its subject matter; another has been its increased potential to call forth *different kinds of reading*.'
> [my italics] [p.9]

Centrally, my thesis is concerned with the nature of what I have variously called a personally meaningful, engaged and appreciative, aesthetic

response to stories. It incorporates the stories that pupils wrote and the shadow stories or virtual texts that are revealed in the responses that the teachers and I made to their stories - and later that pupils made to stories by other authors. It is also narrated as my story, as I describe the journey that I made during the course of the enquiry.

There are several respects, therefore, in which I would hope for a similar personally meaningful, engaged, appreciative and aesthetic response from my readers:

I hope that you will engage with the pupils' stories as the Guidelines suggest, finding in them the delight and pleasure in their writers' creativity that I found and continue to find.

I hope that you will engage with our responses. I hope that you will share their appreciation of the special qualities of each particular story and the achievements of each particular writer.

I hope that you will engage with the issues that are at stake with regard to the educational value of recognising positive achievements and of assessing what a pupil writes or reads interpretively as well as analytically.

I hope, also, that you will engage with my own story, as I seek to clarify and to extend my understanding of the nature and the educational value of responses which pay attention to meaning and which necessarily involve the reader's own thoughts, feelings and impressions in that endeavour.

Prologue - two stories to start with

These are the four modes of verbal expression on which the National Curriculum for English is based: Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing. When I was working with teachers as an English Adviser, I used to point out that each mode, oral or written, could be viewed in three ways:

* **grasping the code**
* **handling the medium**
* **making meaning**

What seemed to be happening with the Statements of Attainment for Writing, (including story writing) as these were put forward in the March 1990 Proposals from the D.E.S. was that attention was being directed very specifically, to the first two ways of looking but hardly at all to the third:

Level 3

a) produce, independently, pieces of writing using complete sentences, mainly demarcated with capital letters and full stops or question marks.
b) shape chronological writing, beginning to use a wider range of connectives than 'and' and 'then'.
c) write more complex stories with detail beyond simple events and with a defined ending. [p.12]

Level 4

a) produce, independently, pieces of writing showing evidence of a developing ability to structure what is written in ways which make the meaning clear to the reader; demonstrate in their writing generally accurate use of sentence punctuation.
b) write stories which have an opening, a setting, characters, a series of events and a resolution and which engage the interest of the reader; produce other kinds of chronologically organised writing.
[p.13]

Apart from that one reference to 'engage the interest of the reader' it seemed that more importance was to be attached to sentence structure, to punctuation and to the number of narrative techniques that pupils had employed, than to what their stories were actually about. Stories were to be *looked at* rather than *looked into*. I feared that hard pressed as teachers were by a multiplicity of National Curriculum requirements, these 'Level Descriptors' would dictate the kind of attention that, predominantly, stories were likely to receive.

As I explained in the Foreword, as an educator, I have always believed that *making meaning* through spoken or written language is its prime function. Not surprisingly, therefore, I wanted pupils to receive quite a different kind of feedback, which took the individuality of their stories into account, and explained the way in which they had activated their teacher's imagination. The first two stories that I want you to read (both by seven year old boys), pre-date my research but they, along with others that I was encountering on my primary school visits at that time, undoubtedly led me to the starting point: what characterises a *meaningful* response to a pupil's story?

According to the 1990 Statements of Attainment both these stories reflect the same characteristics, they both 'have an opening, a setting, characters, a series of events and a resolution' and they both 'engage the interest of the reader'. The fact of the matter is, it is what these features *succeed in creating between them* which is unique and which deserves both recognition and response. As I comment on each in turn, let me try to illustrate why meaning-making on the part of teachers as *story-readers*, rather than story *evaluators*, became a focal point of my research.

I should explain that I have proof-read both these stories for spelling and punctuation, and similarly those which later form the basis of my research data , as I do not wish readers to be distracted by errors in surface features of the writing. No words have been changed and no words put in or taken out. I have paragraphed each narrative as seemed appropriate.

The Good Wizard and the Bad Witch, by Sam

Once upon a time there was a good wizard and there was a bad witch. It was the wizard's worst enemy. The witch did have some friends, they were called Dacal, Spice and Hote and Sid and Monster. The witch's friends came out at midnight.
Once the wizard was working at midnight and then Dacal came down and then came Spice and then came Hote. And then Sid crawled down the wall and then the wizard ran home.
And then the next night the same happened and the next day he tried out his spells and they didn't work and he said "It must be that witch again!" and had his lunch. And when he was half way through a sandwich there was a knock on the door. It was the witch in disguise and the wizard knew it was the witch so he pretended he wasn't in.
The next day he was working and the witch was behind a tree and when the wizard went past she would do something to him. But he didn't come that way.
And then the next day the witch fell out of the castle and all her friends disappeared.

<u>My response as a story reader</u>

I really feel for this rather incompetent wizard who is easily flummoxed and just wants to avoid trouble. He seems to spend most of his time trying to avoid the witch and her friends. I can imagine his relief when she crashes to her death and her beastly little companions vanish for good. I picture her falling from the ramparts like a great black bat. I can't quite picture Dacal, Spice, Hote and Sid and in a way that makes them even more horrible. Sid

could be some kind of serpent as he 'crawls' down the wall, but then again he could have feet like a lizard. The fact that their visits always happen at night makes them seem even more creepy.

I imagine everything happening rather like a cartoon film on television, with the witch lurking behind a tree (like the wicked queen in Snow-white) as she watches the wizard through the window of his cottage bending over his magic book trying in vain to make his spells work. Maybe she gives an evil chuckle...

I do wonder, though what it was that made her fall out of the castle and all her creatures disappear. Perhaps one of the wizard's spells did work after all!

A Frightful Tale, by James

Sam, Andrew and Paul were getting ready for a camping holiday in the Andes. Paul had never been camping before in his life and was a little nervous. (So he should be, if he knew what was going to happen!)

Then they started the long tiring hike to the camping site. It was getting dark and very, very cold. We were half way up in the middle of the woods and they decided to stay the night there.

Paul was just zipping up his sleeping bag, when he heard a deep grunt outside. There was a huge Bear carrying something. Paul turned on his torch and to his horror, it was Sam.

The Bear caught sight of Paul and lumbered across. Paul scooted up a tree and called Andrew and he went up the next tree.The Bear soon lost interest and took its dead prey away into the bushes and they got down.

The next day they hunted the Bear. They found Sam's skeleton but never the Bear. They buried Sam and left for home sadly.

The End

My response as a reader

What strikes me most about James' story is the sense of vulnerability and exposure that I feel for the three young boys. I am keenly aware of the darkness and the fact that they are in wilderness country, half way up a mountain with no access to adult help. I have a vivid impression of the huge bear, caught in Paul's torch beam with Sam's limp body dangling from its jaws. I feel relief that the other two boys survive, and though in a literal sense it would have been foolish for them to hunt for their friend's body, in story terms their discovery and burial of the picked clean bones before they 'returned home sadly', comforts me and provides a sense of resolution.

Both these stories *engage* me as a reader; it is several years since I first encountered them and yet, brief as they are, they still resonate in my imagination. I believed then, as I believe now, that pupils' stories deserve a response which pays attention to what they are about and acknowledges the effect which they have had on a reader.

This, therefore, is the kind of *evocative* response with which the whole of my thesis will concern itself. What features characterise such responses and in what sense can they be perceived as educationally valuable - by those who make them and by those who receive them - be they teachers, pupils or external examiners?

Chapter One

Assembling some maps

Before I could put forward suggestions to the teachers with whom I was hoping to work, for a mode of responding meaningfully to pupils' stories, I knew that I would have to construct some maps for myself that would help to point the way. What was there in the field of reader-response theory that had covered at least some of the same ground that I hoped to traverse? I was already familiar with the broad contours of this particular field through previous reading and a survey that I had conducted for the Schools Council [1973]. However, I knew of no research relating specifically to the responses that **teachers** made to **pupils**' stories that was not focused principally on evaluation.

I chose to go for help initially, to two theorists whose thinking about the nature of reading response might offer some signposts. The two were Louise Rosenblatt, who has consistently emphasised the importance of the interaction between reader and text, and Alan Purves, whose analysis of students' writings about literary texts had produced some interesting categories of response. I decided at this point to return to their work to refresh my memory in order to see whether their ideas could be related to my particular enquiry.

My commentary will be 'multi-layered' in the sense that I am both recollecting the ideas and approaches to reading which I took from their work at the start of my enquiry, but now that I have reached the point of writing my dissertation, I can also consider how they influenced my thinking for better or worse as I went along.

Iser [1978] defines the *reader's* role as one which occupies:

> 'shifting vantage points that are geared... to fit the diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern.' [p.35]

As the *writer* of my story, I know that I shall need to shift my vantage points in much the same kind of way.

Louise Rosenblatt

Rosenblatt first put forward her theories about the transactional nature of any act of reading in *Literature as Exploration* in 1938. She was to reiterate them with unswerving conviction for the next fifty years, although literary critics were slow to recognise her importance. In a recent series of essays published to celebrate her contribution to literary response theory, Carolyn Allen [1991] makes the interesting conjecture that:

> 'perhaps Rosenblatt has not been taken as seriously [as theorists like Iser] simply because she made a conscious decision to eschew jargon and use a straightforward style.' [p.19]

I entirely approve of Rosenblatt's style - and hope to follow her example in the writing of this thesis.

Rosenblatt [1985] maintains that:

> 'The transactional paradigm applies to all reading events. The reader actively creates meaning under guidance of the printed symbols, no matter whether in a newspaper or the text of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*...' [p.37]

She then draws that crucial distinction between the two stances that a reader can take to a text that I have already quoted in my Foreword, but repeat here to save you the trouble of finding it again:

> 'In an efferent reading, the reader's attention is ... focused mainly on *what is to be taken away* from the transaction.
>
> In an aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is focused on *what he is living through* during the reading event. He is attending both to what the verbal signs designate and to the qualitative overtones of the ideas, images, situations and characters that he is evoking under the guidance of the text. The literary work of art comes into being through the reader's attention to what the text *activates within him.*'
>
> [my italics][p.38]

This distinction between the two kinds of *stance* that a reader can choose to take to a text is of the utmost importance with respect to my own enquiry. The difference that taking one or the other stance makes to what a reader perceives in a text, is an issue to which I shall return at a number of different points in my journey. Logically, one would expect a reader to take an aesthetic stance to a work of literature and an efferent stance to non-literary writing but this is not necessarily the case.

Rosenblatt [1985] gives several examples of the tendency for respondents to literature to take an efferent stance - whether they are literary critics and theorists, university students or pupils in school :

> 'The tendency is to turn away from the lived-through experience and to efferently apply a ready-made system of analysis to the reading. ...They are all doing something different from analysis of response to the poem or story or play *as evocation.*' [my italics][p.39]

She observes that:

> 'little has been done to test my view that most questions in classrooms... turn the young reader's attention away from the lived-through poem or story, towards an efferent

reading and analysis of the text.' [p.42]

In considering the implications for research, she asks about the strategies

> 'that can contribute to the child's development of the habit of attention to the qualitative character of *what the text triggers within him.* ' [my italics] [p. 42]

A little later in the same article she claims that:

> 'A more rounded concept of comprehension in both efferent and aesthetic reading is needed, with attention to experiential, affective and cognitive components of meaning. The efferent stance has generally been the concern of reading teachers, theorists and researchers. *Even less has been done to help the student to assimilate also the aesthetic mode of relating to a text. .*'[my italics][p.43]

This chimed strongly, for me, with my own awareness of the efferent or evaluative approaches that teachers were being directed to make to their pupils' stories, which the 'ready-made system of analysis' put forward in the Statements of Attainment for English in the National Curriculum, was intensifying. If their stories were to be read with the teacher's attention focused first and foremost on technical features of correctness or construction, then the teacher's stance was bound to be an efferent one.

There would be no opportunity for what Rosenblatt describes as the 'literary work' to emerge for the teacher-reader as 'a lived through experience' of the story, and consequently no opportunity for that kind of qualitative, aesthetic transaction to be mirrored back to the pupil in the teacher's response.

Although she was by this time writing in the mid-eighties, Rosenblatt could still see very little evidence of any research into strategies for helping

students to develop an aesthetic response, on the part of either the teaching or the literary critical professions. This gave me confidence at the start of my enquiry, that the research which I intended to undertake had not already been replicated and that the question of how to encourage pupils - and their teachers - to take an aesthetic stance as story readers, was worth pursuing.

However, Rosenblatt's proposition that:

> 'The literary work of art comes into being through the reader's attention to *what the text activates within him* '
> [my italics] [p.38]

also raised a crucial question which will keep surfacing throughout my enquiry. Is it appropriate or even possible, for a teacher-reader to take an aesthetic stance to a story written by a child? She acknowledges in *Literature as Exploration* that the reader's personal concerns,

> 'even while he is reading, are present as probably the most important guiding factors in his experience.' [p.35]

How much more strongly are a teacher's *professional* concerns likely to dominate any reading of a pupil's story? Can teachers switch their attention sufficiently from 'what is to be taken away from the transaction' as directed by 'Performance Criteria' and 'Level Descriptors' - and indeed by their own desire to focus on what needs to be improved - to focus fully on the story in the first instance?

Rosenblatt [1938] maintains that:

> 'ultimately, any literary work gains its significance from the way in which the minds and emotions of particular readers respond to the verbal stimuli offered by the text'
> [p.28]

and that:

> 'those engaged in the task of developing sensitivity to a particular art form will not need to be reminded that any such complete experience depends not only on the work itself, but also on *the reader's capacities and readiness.*'
> [my italics] [p.33]

Rosenblatt has student readers in mind of course; what I was wondering about was whether teachers had the 'capacities and readiness' for developing a similar sensitivity to pupils' stories.

In addition, I had to confront the fact that for Rosenblatt, the texts that she has in mind, as those which deserve an aesthetic stance on the part of the reader, are those which she would be inviting her students to study as 'Literature'. If, however, we turn our attention to pupils' stories, are there enough 'ideas, images, situations and characters' in the narratives of these learner writers, for an aesthetic response to be evoked? I shall return to this crucial question in Chapter 10.

Another important aspect of Rosenblatt's work [1938] which comes across loud and clear is her staunch affirmation that moral values play an important part in literary texts - and in the responses that we make to them. She writes that:

> 'The teacher would do neither literature or students a service if he tried to evade ethical issues.' [p.18]

She comments on how:

> 'In recent decades, the influence of the New Criticism and other critical approaches has... tended to diminish concern with the human meaningfulness of the literary work.' [p.29]

In recent years with the advent of structuralism followed by post-

structuralism, it has again become fashionable to regard the words on a page as little more than an object for analysis. I found it refreshing to discover Rosenblatt offering unequivocal support for an approach to the reading of literature (stories, poems or plays) which links that experience with life outside the text:

> 'The literature classroom can stimulate students... to develop a thoughtful approach to human behaviour.' [p. 18]

I was reassured to find Rosenblatt reaffirming what I had always believed as a teacher, that stories explored the way that people relate to each other. It helped me to feel less defensive about finding life-related meanings in pupils' stories, in spite of being disparaged as a 'liberal humanist' by theoreticians such as Terry Eagleton [1983].

It also pleased me to find Rosenblatt making a specific connection between the meaningful functions that writing their own stories can have for students, with a recognition that their development as writers and readers of literature are closely inter-related:

> 'One of the best ways of helping students to gain this appreciation of literary form and artistry, is to encourage them to engage in such imaginative writing. In this way, they will themselves be involved in wrestling with the materials offered them by life or by their reaction to it; they will discover that problems of form and artistry are not separable from the problems of clarifying the particular sense of life or the particular human mood that the work of art is destined to embody.' [p.48]

In a conversation that I had with Kate, one of the participating teachers, at a later stage in my research, she reflects both these points of view:

...this whole way that [story writing] gives you an opening to discuss their

experiences, their values, their morals, their reflection on life. If you believe literature is important then their own writing is important because it is an extension of it.

Rosenblatt [1985] returns to this inter-relationship between story writing and story reading as one that deserves further research:

> 'The interplay between writing and reading - and the hypothesis is that the influence tends to be reciprocal - offers another area for research, especially for those interested in the teaching of literature.' [p.49]

Could the way in which teachers respond to pupils' story writing also have a beneficial effect upon their development as story readers?

There are two further closely inter-connected issues with regard to personal response, referred to by Rosenblatt [1985], to which I wish to draw attention: the importance of the *contribution* that a reader taking an aesthetic stance can bring to the text, and the recognition of the *relativity* of such responses. Rosenblatt acknowledges that:

> 'The same text may give rise to different "works" (or evocations) in transactions with different readers, or with the same reader at different times.' [p.36]

and that:

> 'various interpretations might be equally acceptable.' [p.36]

My thoughts jump forward at this point, as I recollect the variations in the responses that a group of pupils made to Matthew's story, *The Knight and the Mushroom* [Chapter 4] and that the same class later made in responding to Chris Powling's story *Ice* [Chapter 14]. For some, their visual imaginations were powerfully activated by the setting and the action, for others, it was their

feelings of sympathy or empathy with the central character that took precedence.Each reader in his or her own way, was making an aesthetic transaction with the text.

The *variations,* as I now realise, could have offered the teacher an excellent opportunity to explore with the class the differences between their aesthetic responses and the kind of efferent response that a set of comprehension questions might extract, such as those demanded by the KS2 Reading Test, which I describe in Chapter 16.

The question of various interpretations raises one more issue that will need to be addressed as I write the story of my research. Is an aesthetic response to a story assessable for examination purposes, if it is open to such variations, and if so, in what respects? It is an issue to which I shall return in the three final chapters of my dissertation.

Alan C. Purves

The Report which Purves wrote with the assistance of Victoria Rippere and which The National Council of Teachers of English published in 1968 was entitled *Elements of Writing about a Literary Work: A Study of Response to Literature.* In the Introduction it described in considerable detail

> 'a schema for content analysis that would be applicable to a broad range of expressed responses to a literary work.'

The study was designed to be of some help to a research organisation called *International Educational Achievement* which was set up in the sixties, and which in this field was trying to categorise and to compare student responses to literature across several countries including the UK. I

had taken a small part in the study and subsequently commented in some detail on the NCTE Research Report to which I am now referring, in *Reading for Meaning* [1973].

On the inside cover of the Report, Purves sets out the purposes of his study as follows:

> 'To find a basis for comparing responses to literature by students, teachers, and critics of different countries or traditions.
> *To discover a means of describing the process or the constituents of writing about literature*, whether that writing be critical or sub-critical or non-critical.
> *To inspect the counters or procedures as used by those who respond to and write about literature.*
> To acquaint researchers with the 'elements' of writing about literature that individual writers draw from and combine in fashioning their essays.
> To set forth *a scheme for content analysis of expressed responses to a literary work.*' [my italics]

For the purposes of my research, I shared Purves's interest in the second and third of these purposes - and possibly also an interest in 'a scheme for content analysis of expressed responses' related to those responses which my Guidelines were designed to elicit.

The 'elements' defined by Purves, drawn as they were from a whole range of responses that students had made to literary works of considerable complexity, were far too detailed to be applicable to my study. However, in searching for directions that would help me to map the kind of response that could be characterised as personally meaningful, I chose to focus on the first two of the four basic 'categories' into which Purves had divided his

elements: ***Engagement-involvement*** and ***Perception***.

Purves described these categories as follows:

> **Engagement-involvement**, the first category, defines the various ways by which the [student] writer indicates his surrender to the literary work, by which he *informs his reader of the ways in which he has experienced the work or its various aspects*.'
> **Perception** is almost self-explanatory: it encompasses the ways in which a person looks at the work *as an object distinct from himself*....' [my italics] [p.6]

With hindsight, I realise that if I had read Purves's definition of *Perception* more carefully, I should have realised that it was entirely efferent in Rosenblatt's terms, deliberately distancing the text from any thoughts and feelings that the reader may bring to it, in order to regard it dispassionately as an object for analysis. In fact Purves's third category of *Interpretation* would have been more appropriate as a form of personally meaningful response: one in which the reader 'seeks to connect [the work] to the world he knows.' [p.7]

I have to remind myself, that at this early stage, I was still at the start of my quest for what a 'meaningful response' to a story entailed. I was thinking of 'engagement' as 'stepping in' and 'perception' as 'stepping out' of a story, but without losing sight of what that particular story was about. I was happy to invite references to narrative construction in my Guidelines, as long as they related to details of the text and were not restricted to generalisations. I did not, as yet, understand the importance of retaining *the reader's own evocation* of the story if what I described as an *appreciative* response was to continue to be personally meaningful.

What I did not perceive initially, is that where my suggestions for making an *engaged* response in the Guidelines always involved an aesthetic stance - the 'stepping out' or 'looking at' a story's construction could easily shift the reader into taking that more distanced analytic stance described in Purves's definition of Perception, unless the reader retained that essential 'lived through' experience which engagement had evoked, as a benchmark.

Chapter Two

Voicing my intentions - then other voices join in

Responding positively to a story once it is complete

There was another aspect to my enquiry which also influenced the wording of the first set of Guidelines. For more than a decade, I had been involved as an Adviser, in working with primary and secondary teachers to develop contexts for helping pupils in the *process* of writing stories to achieve their maximum potential. Between us, we had produced booklets[1] based on classroom practice, describing the different stages through which story writing moves before it can successfully be presented as a finished product: the pre-draft exploratory stage when ideas are generated, the draft itself, the revision of that draft - clarifying the meaning, proof-reading - and then the careful presentation of the story in its final form. I was keenly aware of the considerable investment which many teachers and pupils brought to these activities.

I regarded it, therefore, as a logical extension of my interest in pupils' story writing, to enquire further into the kind of response that teachers might make to their *completed* stories. My interest in the stories *as they were developing*, had naturally focused at the post-draft stage on how they could be improved. At both primary and secondary levels, teachers in our 'Write to Learn' Project had spent a great deal of time trying out activities that would help this process of improvement, such as working with response partners and making specific suggestions for how a draft could be edited as I illustrated in some detail in *Making Sense, Shaping Meaning* [1989].

[1] Clarkson, *Map me a Story*, Corbey and Emery, *Creating Infant Story Books*; D'Arcy, *Writing: A Voyage of Discovery*, Maxwell and Thirlaway, *Writing: 7-15, Scope for Development*. [printed but unpublished]

Now, I wanted to enquire in more detail into what a meaningful response to a *completed* story might look like, which focused on explicit references to the writer's achievements. I felt strongly that once the final presentation of the story had been made, the teacher's response should be *affirmative* - letting pupils know in what ways their stories had succeeded. If they had been given adequate opportunities to explore their own ideas in the first instance, and to revise their draft for meaning as well as for correctness, then they had given the stories which they produced their best shot. It seemed to me that there was no point in suggesting further improvements to this finished story, better to concentrate on aspects of what the writer had actually achieved.

In this respect, I hoped that my suggested kinds of response in the Guidelines would be meaningful to pupils, a) by enabling them to share the teacher's own experience of the story in its finished form, and b) by offering them an explicit appreciation of aspects of its construction.

Here, then, is the first version of my Guidelines for making a meaningful response that I took to my initial meetings with the teachers who were about to be involved:

Guidelines - first version

Three possible responses from story reader to story writer

Engagement: Enter into the world of the story. 'Live' whatever is happening along with the central character. Imagine what it might have felt like to have these experiences. Let the writer know how you re-created the story inside your own head.

Appreciation: Now step out of the story. Comment positively on any aspects of the story-making that have worked well, with regard to the characters, the setting and the plot. Pin your comments to specific

details. Avoid generalisations - what you are appreciating are aspects of the unique meaning which the writer has created in this particular story.

Questions: You may have questions as a story reader about why something happened, or about what might happen next. Avoid making suggestions about possible changes to the text but feel free to ask about the meaning in a way that will encourage the writer to take the story seriously as well.

*** Bear in mind that these are not professional writers. They are learning the craft of story writing and of course there will be obvious flaws. But concentrate on drawing attention explicitly to what they have achieved, in order to encourage further achievements next time.

Making the visits

Next, I visited each of the three primary schools and talked individually to the class teacher who had agreed to collaborate. In each case, the teacher chosen by the Head was the school's Language Co-ordinator. I also talked individually to two of the secondary teachers who had already expressed an interest in the research and on two occasions I was given half an hour at an English Department meeting to explain what I was hoping for and invite contributions.

I am all too conscious, as I recreate these meetings in my mind, of how little time I allowed for teachers to ask questions or express reservations. I felt so fired with enthusiasm for the kind of meaningful personal responses that I had described in the Guidelines, it didn't even occur to me that teachers might have reservations. The responses I had in mind made sense to me; I saw no reason why they should not make equal sense to my potential contributors!

To illustrate what an Engaged, and then an Appreciative response might look like, I had used my own Guidelines to write down as if I were writing to James, what I had 'made' of *A Frightful Tale* and what I liked about the way he had written it:

Engagement

What a spine-chilling story! I can just imagine the sheer horror that Paul must have felt when he caught sight of the bear in the beam of his torch and then realised that what it was carrying in its mouth was Sam. I guess Sam was already dead as he wasn't making any sound. I think Paul and Andrew were really lucky though, that the bear lost interest in them - maybe because he already had some prey to eat.

Appreciation

I like the way you give the reader a hint that something awful is going to happen on this camping trip, by telling us that Paul was right to be nervous about it. The fact that it is dark and cold - and so far from human civilisation all adds to this sense of foreboding. At the climax of the tale, we just have this one beam of light from Paul's torch which catches the full horror of what is happening.

Questions

I have two questions about your story: 1) Don't you think it was rather foolish of Paul and Andrew to go hunting the bear the next day? I'd have come down off the mountain as quickly as I could as soon as it grew light. 2) How come these inexperienced boys were allowed to go on a camping holiday in such a dangerous environment without any adults on the trip?

Second thoughts

As I re-read these responses that I made at the start of my research, I now

regard my two questions as largely inappropriate, especially the second one. I feel that they are far too *literal*, denying the fantasy qualities that stories possess. As I wrote more recently in the Prologue to this thesis: 'in story terms their discovery and burial of the picked clean bones before they "returned home sadly", comforts me and provides a sense of resolution.' In fact, here is an example of Rosenblatt's observation that it is not only different readers who respond differently to the same story, but also the same reader on different occasions.

My second thoughts are also belatedly rueful, when I consider how little opportunity I gave for discussion, although in the department meetings I do recall that we were, as always in department meetings, pressed for time. I remember one teacher expressing some confusion about the differences between my first and second kinds of response, wondering whether the separation between *Engagement* and *Appreciation* was really necessary.

This was to become an issue that later would occupy much time and thought, but full of optimism at the start of my enquiry, I brushed it aside. I had every confidence that once they had tried using my Guidelines, teachers would find it easy to respond 'meaningfully' according to the distinctions I had made.

Other voices join in

My next opportunity to meet with secondary teachers came at the beginning of the Spring term, 1995. At this early stage, there were still no responses to pupils' stories available as research data, apart from the one which I had offered as an example, to *A Frightful Tale*. Towards the end of the previous term, however, I had tried out a slightly different version of the Guidelines,

(adapted to refer to a published story), with a Y8 group of pupils whose teacher had asked them to respond to a short story by Katherine Mansfield called *The-Child-Who-Was-Tired.* It seemed at the time to be a good idea to use the same story and the same Guidelines with the teachers.

The Guidelines which I had used on that occasion with pupil readers and now with teachers read as follows:

Guidelines - second version

THREE POSSIBLE RESPONSES FROM STORY READERS TO STORY WRITERS

Engagement

When you make an engaged response, your attention is focused on the story itself - not on the writer behind the story. You are attending to what the story is about - to how characters feel and think and behave and to how you visualise moments in the story. On a first reading, you may also be attending closely to what is happening and to what you think is going to happen. In other words, what are you 'making' of the story inside your own head? What thoughts/feelings/images come to mind?

Appreciation

Now step out of the story in order to consider how the writer has achieved the effects which have 'engaged' you. Because this is an appreciation, concentrate on what the writer has succeeded in doing (not what s/he could, in your opinion, do better). Relate your comments on the author's handling of the narrative to specific details in the story. Clearly there will be an overlap with the details you have commented on as an engaged reader but now you are focusing on an appreciation of the writer's skills - as you perceive them.

Questions

There may be aspects of the story which puzzle, confuse or intrigue you. If it were possible, what would you like the author to enlarge upon or explain in more detail?

The first half of the meeting was taken up with the teachers reading the Mansfield story and then taking about 15 minutes to write their responses before moving into a discussion. So at least on this occasion they had an opportunity to try out responding, in the way the Guidelines suggested, for themselves. I collected these written responses at the end of the meeting but they did not in any specific way form part of the discussion which took place after they had been produced. Rather it was the way that these teachers had felt about the Guidelines themselves and the issues that being asked to respond in this way raised for them, that took up the rest of our time together.

Issues raised in the discussion

Engagement

The first issue to arise was that of 'engagement' - and what it actually meant. Daniela was clearly frustrated by what she had experienced as an impossible demand as she immediately came in with:

I wasn't engaged - and the whole engagement thing was a real problem for me.

For Daniela, her inability to engage with the story was closely connected with her dislike of the story's style. In her written response she had explained that she was irritated by the constant references to the central character as 'The-Child-Who-Was-Tired' - a device that had irritated other readers also, as did the fairy tale overtones. Erica, for instance, had written:

I wouldn't normally choose to read any story that had names like *The-Child-Who-Was-Tired* set in a mythical Red Riding Hood type of country.

Initially, therefore, the engagement issue centred on whether or not the reader had liked the story. It then switched into whether or not you wanted to read on:

Andy: *I didn't enjoy it. I didn't like it and found myself getting irritated as I was*

reading it.

Kevin: *I found it a nasty story.*

David: *Yes, I found it very nasty.*

Kevin:*I didn't like it but I think I was engaged by it.*

Pat: *Engagement doesn't necessarily mean you have to like something does it?*

Daniela: *No, but it sort of hooks you - maybe it's the word engaged...*

Andy... *actually I wanted to pack it in. When I got to the second page, I just wanted to stop reading it...*

David: *I think hooked is a good word. You've just got to want to read on.*

Knowing the pupil writer

Dawn then makes an important new distinction which had not previously occurred to me:

We don't know Katherine Mansfield but we do know the pupils whose stories we read - and then you're engaged with the person who's written it.

This issue of knowing the pupil writer, clearly had important implications for these teachers that I had not foreseen. For one thing, they objected strongly to the idea in my first suggested response, that you could put the pupil out of mind and concentrate wholly on the story.

Andy said:

I don't force myself to engage with the thing that the kid's written. What I do, is, I have a kind of image of the kid in mind, as I'm reading through what they've written. And I can read the most god awful crap from the kids but because I know who's written it, I don't say to them "This is god awful crap" 'cos I'm thinking about the kid. Where with the Katherine Mansfield story, I'd be prepared to say," as far as I'm concerned, this is god awful crap - I didn't enjoy it at all" - I would never say that to a kid.

Helping learner writers

Andy goes on to offer another reason why he regards children's stories as

different from those of professional writers:

Kids are writing more or less in response to conditions that I've set up in the classroom - which might mean "Yeh, because I told them to" or it might mean that they enjoy something we've done in class together and they actually want to write something down. But they're not professionals.

A little later Andy adds:

When I read kids' stories... I read those from an educational point of view... There's an element of lit. crit. creeps in but its mainly because I want the kids to get better at writing stories. Whereas when I read Raymond Carver, I'm not bothered about Raymond Carver getting better as a story writer - what I'm bothered about there, is understanding my response to that story. And I think to me these two things are quite different. And I don't think I could possibly respond to a kid's work in the same way.

There seem to be three reasons here behind the distinctions that Andy makes between his educational responses to pupils' stories and his *readerly* responses to published stories:

1) He does not wish to de-motivate pupils by rubbishing what they write.

2) His response must take into account the classroom context which may or may not have activated a sense of commitment to the stories that were produced.

3) His chief concern is to help his pupils to improve as story writers.

Pupils' stories require a different kind of response

This insistence, that responding to pupil story writers (and in consequence to the story they have produced) was quite different from responding to a published author's story, now became the central issue in our discussion.

David maintained that:

The fact that I engage with both doesn't make me worry that I engage

differently.

At the time, I took this distinction to imply that these teachers thought it was impossible to take an aesthetic stance towards their pupils' stories. And indeed, my supervisor who was present at the meeting, suggested that my request for teachers to respond as *story readers* rather than as *evaluators* or *assessors* looked as though it was untenable. Inwardly I was distressed at the unexpected reluctance of the teachers to engage with this story in the way my Guidelines had suggested, especially as it had moved me quite deeply! But I was not ready to give up so easily.

I was somewhat reassured, when I read the written responses that these teachers had actually made to the Katherine Mansfield story in accordance with my Guidelines. True, this was a story by a professional author, for whom I had just been told they were not prepared to make any allowances, but only two of the ten respondents had been so put off by her style that they were unable to 'experience' the story at all.

One teacher had responded with intense feeling:

It all feels so dark, cold, grey and wet... by the end of the first page I immediately felt very angry that she was treated in that way...The tiredness just builds and builds. At times it felt unbearable... I was longing for her to get a break...fear permeates everything...

Another had brought all his visual capacities to bear:

I found myself primarily engaging with visual images to help me construct a mental idea of the physical environment... I then found that having done this, the action took over my engagement, allowing me to "see" the child going about her duties etc. There was also an element

of associated images from TV, films etc. which I was using to help construct the scene.

Yet another's written response reflected a mixture of thoughts and feelings, which also reflected back onto herself:

I feel as if I might have been driven to do something similar to escape that horrendous life of oppression...I think the news of the other baby might have driven me over the edge and I'd like to think that I would have walked away at that point before reaching the stage of killing the baby...It's strange not to like her but to feel sorry for her. I'm trying to think hard about why I don''t like her.

Surely, I said to myself, these teachers could take a similar stance to the stories their pupils wrote. I now know, as I look back on the rest of the journey which at that stage was still to come, that such a stance to pupils' stories is both possible and demonstrable. In what respects it can be said to have an educational value, is an issue to which I shall constantly return as my thesis unfolds.

I can also now see with the benefits of hindsight, how the impression was created that we were at cross purposes about whether to pay attention to the story or to the writer. In my concern that the unique meanings of individual stories were being ignored, I had specifically directed attention away from the writer *in the first instance*:

When you make an engaged response, your attention is focused on *the story itself* - not on the writer behind the story.

I had omitted to explain, in my initial school visits and also at this meeting, that one of my reasons for giving the story close and thoughtful attention was in order to give it genuine status *in the eyes of the pupil who had written it*

thereby to increase her confidence and motivation for future efforts as a story writer.

I also discovered when I began to write my own responses to the pupils' stories as they came in, that there is a distinction between what the writer makes of a story *as she reads*, and her *formulated response* to that evocation. While I was reading a child's story, I could, if I chose, concentrate entirely on the thoughts, the feelings and the images that were occurring in my mind as I 'transacted' with the text. When I came to make my written response, I was recollecting all of these but *at the same time* I was considering how I might share them with the child in a way that would both please her and have educational value.

Chapter Three

Three primary excursions

Initially, as I have already explained, I deliberately set out to elicit, with the help of the Guidelines, responses from teachers which were engaged with the story which the words on the page created; responses which also made it clear that the reader was an active participant in the processes which re-created that story in her mind. In addition, I asked each of the contributing teachers to choose three of four stories from the class, which had interested them, *as stories* . I wanted to allow the fullest possible opportunity for responses to be made which would be personally meaningful.

However, where the Guidelines were designed specifically to encourage what Rosenblatt described as an *aesthetic* transaction with the text, once we had made our responses, I was open to whatever they might reveal about the nature of that personal meaningfulness. Only by taking a close look at the content of our responses would I be able to ask myself further questions about their nature or their educational value.

I was also interested to find out to what extent our engaged responses (as individual readers to individual stories) would be similar and to what extent they would diverge. Would our subjective reactions reveal common concerns with respect to the story that each of us was considering or would they take off in different directions?

Winter [1989] comments:

> 'The practical problem about a text which presents a unified argument is that the unity of the writing needs to be worked out in advance, so that it often seems very difficult to start writing at all: every paragraph is burdened with

> the meaning of the totality, and yet when you first put pen to paper, you don't know what that totality is going to amount to.' [p.114]

Because, at this point, I had little idea, as the data came in, of what the 'totality' was going to amount to, I responded initially to each of the stories myself before I read the responses which the teachers had made and then, after studying each batch of responses carefully, (theirs and mine), I wrote what I called to myself a Research Paper, to collect my accumulating thoughts from one 'cycle' of responses to the next.

To capture some of my 'first soundings' from the primary children's stories and our responses to them, I shall draw on these early Research Papers as well as looking forward from time to time to what I learnt later. For reasons of space, I have chosen in this chapter, to comment in some detail on the responses that the teachers and I made to one or two stories only from each school, along with some of our reflections in the conversations which subsequently took place.

Initially, I had the intention of including all the pupils' stories in the body of this thesis. Although my enquiry focuses on *response*, the stories themselves are inseparable from what we made of them. Each has its individual character which is embedded in my mind. It is with considerable reluctance therefore, that for reasons of length, I have had to confine many in their entirety to an Appendix outside the thesis itself, as though they were in some way peripheral. They are not. I can only hope that interested readers will take the time to engage with them in their entirety, in order to evoke their own virtual texts and to compare their responses with ours.

Background

Between mid-January and the end of March, 1995 I made my planned visits to the three primary schools where the Language Co-ordinators had agreed to collaborate with my enquiry. In each case I visited the school on four occasions. On three of these I was involved in taking the children through the stages of a story-writing unit: an exploratory pre-draft session to generate ideas, then a post-draft revision session after a week's interval during which the children had written their drafts and then, after a further interval of a week, a celebratory story-sharing session now that the children had had time to produce their completed stories. I returned for a fourth visit after the teacher had sent me the stories to which she had chosen to respond, once I had also made my response. On this occasion I talked to the authors about their stories and also, at some length, to the teacher at the end of the school day.

Revising the Guidelines

After my discussion with the secondary teachers which I have described in the previous chapter, I had decided that maybe the Guidelines sounded too prescriptive and too wordy, so I produced a shorter version. Also, I was concerned that the term 'Engagement' might give confusing signals. I was later to come back, very positively to the concept of engagement, but at this point my confidence had been somewhat dented, so for a short while, my initial kind of response was described more neutrally, as 'reactive'.

The slimmed down Guidelines to which the primary teachers were referring as they made their responses, read as follows:

Guidelines - third version

Three possible responses from story readers to story writers

Reacting - to the **story**

what do you 'make' of the text inside your head/
what thoughts/feelings/images does the story evoke?

Appreciating - the **writer**

what has the writer achieved in the handling of the narrative?

Questioning -

are there any aspects of the story which puzzle or intrigue you?

Audience -

Remember that your comments as a story reader are for the writer of the story. You want them to be understood and to give satisfaction to her/him.

School A

The children with whom I worked were a Y3/4 class of 7-9 year olds and the story that I have chosen to illustrate some of the issues that arose from the way in which each of us responded to it, is by Dorothy who was eight years old. It is called *Lost Underground Treasure*[1] and recounts the adventures of a fictional Dorothy who helps a group of elves to recover their family treasures before returning to her own world above ground. As we explain what we made of the text, our comments on details that held significance for us also give some indication of the particular story which Dorothy herself created; they do not hide it behind generalisations.

Jill's 'Reaction to the story':

I presumed the bridge must have been significant - it wasn't mentioned as such. When you were falling it reminded me of Alice in Wonderland but I was surprised that you whispered 'ouch' and then realised that it must have been a

[1] See the Appendix at the end of the thesis for the full story

cushioned, soft fall - I actually felt better for you then.
I wonder what Faye must have been thinking; you mention your parents but actually I felt very sorry for Faye.
The main character was very kind. At first, when you became an elf and hid behind a pebble, I thought the story was going to be disastrous and you were going to have lots of difficulties because of your size, and then I realised that this wouldn't happen when you immediately responded to the little elf crying.
I think maybe all the elves had been humans who had fallen down the hole in the bridge.
When it got to the bit with the gremlin, I was relieved that there wasn't a lot of detail of the death leap.
I really enjoyed the story and felt carried along by the pace as they set off to find the treasure.
The end bit, finding a toy elf in your pocket reminded me of a story I know called *Dolphin Boy*.

My 'Reaction to the story':

Dorothy is a very conscientious little girl isn't she? I like the way she immediately offers to help the elves find their treasure but warns them that she can't stay too long as she knows people will be worried about her. She remembers this at the end of the huge party, even though she must have been enjoying herself. I can tell she is sorry to leave, as she sighs goodbye, but she goes home all the same.
The part of the story that I can see best in my mind, is where they are all busy getting ready to go (a bit like getting ready for a camping holiday) and then when they reach the muddy railway track I can see the line stretching away with the green light in the distance.

A comparison of our comments and how I perceive them to be personally meaningful in relation to the story.

In Research Paper 2, I make the following observations:

Jill concentrates first of all on the bridge which features at the beginning of the story. Her reaction as a reader, is that the bridge 'must be significant'. I hardly noticed the bridge but Jill's response makes me realise that the bridge is actually a metaphorical way of bridging the gap between the real world and the fantasy world in which the story takes place.
Like several of the experienced readers who commented on *The-Child-Who-Was-Tired*, Jill is reminded of another reading experience, in this case *Alice in Wonderland*, which also starts with a deep down fall and the reduction in size of the girl heroine.

Jill's next response to the story is a logical one, working out for herself why `'ouch!'` was whispered rather than yelped: `'it must have been a soft landing.'`
Jill shares with Dorothy (at one and the same time the central character and the writer of the story) how her thoughts and expectations changed, as her journey through the story progressed: `'At first... I thought... and then I realised...'`. *This gives both story and story writer genuine status, seen as they are through the eyes of a genuine story reader.*

Her speculation that all the elves might have been human once certainly never occurred to me and I doubt that it occurred to Dorothy. *But this does not invalidate it as a possibility. An important point in sharing what you 'make' of a story, is to recognise how it can become a different 'event' or 'evocation' inside different heads.*

About my own response I wrote:
'I was chiefly struck by the coherence with which various details throughout the story reveal the kind of person that Dorothy is. I notice that I collect and

feed back to the writer all those details which together reveal Dorothy as "a very conscientious little girl". *So in a sense, yes, I do have the writer in mind. I am conscious of letting her know what my reactions as a story reader have been. She is the audience to whom I am addressing these remarks.*'

Both of us express our feelings about the behaviour of the main character - I approve her conscientiousness and Jill writes:

`The main character was very kind... when you immediately responded to the little elf crying.`

Rosenblatt [1938] wrote:

> 'The teaching of Literature inevitably involves the conscious or unconscious reinforcement of ethical attitudes.'[p.6]

It seems to me that the same could be said about *story writing*. It is clear that here we are addressing the Dorothy who wrote the story as well as the Dorothy who took part in it.

Issues that came up in my conversation with Jill

I began my conversation with Dorothy's teacher by asking her whether she could see the difference, now, between the kind of 'story reader' response that I was trying to elicit through the Guidelines, and the more usual evaluative kind of teacher response.

Jill replies:

Well, yes, if we're talking about the response that you normally have as a teacher... which is you're looking for certain things - whether there's a beginning and end or not... all the other technical things.

She continues:

And yes, it was very different. And it was very, very interesting, because I don't think I've ever looked at their stories in that way before - as a story. It is in your mind all the time that you're looking for certain things within the story.

A little later she adds:

I think it would have been very easy for me to say that in the majority of stories that I looked at, that I could not actually engage or respond to them in that way... But then it was because of the way I was reading them. It was such a valuable exercise to have done that, because now I can look at everybody's story in a very different way.

I then ask:

What were the kind of things that your attention was drawn to in any of the stories...?

and she replies:

Well ... your attention's drawn to not just what they had written down, but what that could lead to... how much more was implied in what they were saying... there was a lot more depth to it when you really read it properly and looked at it in that way instead of just superficially. In many ways I was very surprised.

I was interested that paying close attention to each story had led Jill to the conclusion that ***there was potential there that was not made explicit,*** as this chimed for me with my impression that the stories of these young writers were really the tip of the iceberg. This led us to the kind of questions we might ask about their stories and the extent to which such questioning responses come across as positive or negative for the story writer:

P: *Because questions can be about those bits we would like to have known more about. Do you think that's helpful as a way of demonstrating to them what story readers would like to know?*

J: *Yes, I think it is, I think it's very valuable. I mean I try in the classroom a certain amount of them reading their stories out to each other - to feel that it is something to be shared.*

P: *But then inviting - not in a critical way but in a sharing way again "What else might you have liked to have known about the story?" I think that actually helps the writer to be more aware about the kind of things that a reader might value.*

There is also, however, the issue of the writer's ownership of her own story. I recall how I had said to Dorothy that the elves' activities before they set off in search of the treasure had reminded me of preparations for a camping holiday and how Dorothy had said she rejected this. I add that different story readers may well have different responses and Jill says:

That's right - you're not imposing it on them, you're telling them what you thought.

I reply:

And it's open to them to say "Well, I thought something different about it". ... I think this is an important part of story reading responses, that it is helpful for children to realise that there are different things we pick up on .

Again, as I re-read this part of our conversation, I am reminded of Rosenblatt's observation [1985] that:

> **'Various interpretations might be equally acceptable. ... Both text and reader must be taken into consideration if one seeks to understand the factors that either permit or block the reader's attention to elements of the text.' [p.36]**

Jill has already said that she encourages her children to share their stories with each other. I can see as I talk to her, how this sharing could be developed further, if Jill models for them how *she* responded as a story

reader, by offering her own thoughts, feelings and impressions about one of their stories and then encourages them to write down their own personal responses, so that the variations can be discussed, and the reasons for these individual variations explored.

Jill perceives this possibility as a valuable way of helping her children to develop *as story readers*::

In that way I think it's of great value. Because I do tend to worry about the fact that you get - particularly amongst the girls - a lot of technically good readers, but they don't read in the way I understand reading, which is being totally in the story, making your own interpretation about what's happening. And it does worry me that they're not really "reading". They're not getting from their reading what they should.

Jill has perceived an educationally valuable link here between the way that she has been responding 'reactively' to stories by her pupil writers and the way in which, by encouraging them to make a similar response, she can also encourage their development as readers.

School B

The children with whom I worked according to a similar pattern of visits in the second school, were also a Y3/4 class. At the time, a student teacher, Michelle, was sharing in the classwork. I have chosen two stories as my 'case histories' for this cycle in my enquiry. Charles was in Y3 and Andrew in Y4; both children were 8 years old. Kim, the class teacher responded to Charles and Michelle, the student teacher responded to Andrew.

Tom at Terror Towers, by Charles

Once upon a time there was a nine year old boy called Tom. He and his Mum always argued. One day his Mum made him so

angry he ran away.
He ran through a spooky forest. He felt scared so he ran through the forest until he got to a broken down castle. It was a spooky castle but he decided to explore it. He ran over the creaky drawbridge and opened the big wooden door.The inside seemed worse than outside. There was cobwebs everywhere. In front there was a staircase. Tom decided to go up the staircase. At the top was a door, he went in the door.
Tom screamed - there was a ghost!
Tom ran out of the door, down the staircase, out of the big door, along the drawbridge, through the forest and back home. "Sorry Mum," said Tom.
"That's all right," said Tom's Mum.

Kim's responses to Charles' story

Reaction to the story

Poor Tom! Things just seemed to get worse and worse, didn't they? I think your story had a message or a moral - that however bad things may be at home, sometimes it's the best place to be.

Appreciation of the writer

Your story shows that you are learning a lot from our story sessions. On the first page you have told me who the characters are and you have told me what the conflict is - Tom and his Mum are always arguing. You use lots of lovely words like spooky and creaky - these help me to make pictures in my head. I like the way you keep reminding me about how Tom is feeling. You build up very well to the moment when Tom saw the ghost - I was scared too!
I loved the way you described Tom running out of the castle and all the way home. I had to read really fast to keep up with Tom!

Questions

I did wonder about some things: What did Tom's Mum say to make him angry enough to run away?

What did the ghost do to frighten Tom away? What did it look like?
Did Tom and his Mum learn anything from the episode? Did they decide to try and get along better in the future?

I now realise as I re-read Kim's responses, what it is that maintains her aesthetic or engaged stance in all of them. Because she is addressing all her remarks to Charles, she retains her personal voice throughout. His story never becomes a mere 'object for analysis' and thus her transaction with the text never shifts from aesthetic to efferent. She is sharing her *experience* of the story as much in her appreciation and her questions, as she was in her initial reactions - and so, when I come to re-read my own response, am I.

At the time, I recalled the secondary teachers' insistence that the pupil can never be put out of mind, and wondered, whether this form of direct address to the author (which would rarely occur in a response to a published story), is an important factor which renders *both* kinds of response personally meaningful, the appreciation as well as the engagement. I return to this point in Chapter 10.

My responses to Charles' story

Reaction to the story

If I'd been Tom, I don't think I would have dared to cross the drawbridge and go inside the ruined castle - especially with all those huge bats flying about! I can't decide whether he was stupid or brave to go up that staircase through all the cobwebs. He must have been half expecting to see something horrible, judging from the speed with which he beats a retreat!
I'm glad the story ends with Tom and his Mum being friends again.

Appreciation of the writer

I like the way you take us inside the castle 'over the creaky drawbridge', through that 'big wooden door' and then up the cobwebby staircase to the door at the top. The details help me to picture what Tom was doing in my mind. I particularly like the way you list all the places he has to speed past in order to get home. It reminds me of a story called *Bears in the Night* which ends in a very similar way.

Questions

I want to know what was so horrible and terrifying about the ghost, that Tom screamed and fled in such a panic.

Pictures in the mind

The main issue on which I focused in my 3rd Research Paper, with regard to this story (and also to *The Runaway Tiger*) is related to the nature of the visual impressions or images that either do or do not occur inside a reader's head. Our responses to both stories raise for the first time in my enquiry, some puzzling questions about how we visualise what is happening in a story, which I explore further in the next chapter, and again, when I come to Iser's concept of ideating in Chapters 9 and 10.

Charles' teacher tells him:

You use lots of lovely words... [which] help me to make pictures in my head.

When I ask her about these pictures, she replies:

'I could just picture him dashing all the way and retracing every step that he'd taken in the build up...I could picture everything happening'

- but still she offers no detail of what she saw - if indeed she saw anything.

When pressed further:

What would you say most appealed to your imagination in Charles' story?'

she repeats:

'I loved the build up of suspense... and I loved that bit of tearing denouement - when he rushed back.

Somewhat similarly, in my Appreciation for Charles, I run through the details which he gives such as the `'creaky drawbridge'`, the `'big wooden door'` and the `'cobwebby staircase'` but I don't expand on these phrases - I let the words *do the work for me.* Later, I was to read with much interest the suggestions that Iser makes about the nature of a reader's visual impressions, but at this point in my enquiry, I was both intrigued and puzzled.

The Runaway Tiger - by Andrew

At the Zoo one day, a man who works there was showing the people all of the animals.
As he got to the tiger, something serious happened.
The tiger jumped over the fence and made everybody scream when it was running away. The man who works there was so angry that his face went red hot because he couldn't finish showing the people the Animals. He was running after him shouting 'Come back! Come back!'
When he was in the woods chasing him, some other men heard about the escaping tiger so they took their nets to try and catch it. They went to the woods to find him. They suddenly heard something running, it was the tiger and the man running after it. They helped him catch it. One of them caught him by surprise and got him by the head and dragged him all the way to the zoo.
Then he was happy because he can work there again.

Michelle's response

Reaction to the story

I think the zoo keeper must have been embarrassed when the tiger escaped and his face went 'red hot'. I guess that is why he is happy at the end of the story, when the tiger was returned to the zoo.
I'd like to know what the tiger was feeling as well. He must have desperately wanted to leave the zoo - to jump over the railings and run into the woods. Was the tiger angry or upset when he was returned to the zoo?

Appreciation of the writer

I like the way you have used words like 'suddenly' to add excitement to your story. You also kept my attention and made me want to read on at the beginning of your story when you say 'As he got to the tiger, something serious happened...

My response

Reaction to story

I guess it was the keeper who was happy at the end of the story - not the tiger! The keeper must have been afraid that he would lose his job if the tiger wasn't recaptured. I feel quite sorry for the tiger because he must have felt pretty desperate to leap over the bars like that. Personally, I don't like to think of wild animals being imprisoned in zoos.

Appreciation of the writer

I like the sense of intense activity which you create with all those men chasing the tiger and swinging their nets as they catch hold of him.
I'm also very impressed with your drawings of the tiger - especially when you can only see bits of him once he has escaped.

Questions

What was it exactly, that made the tiger suddenly leap over the railings and make a bid for freedom? Was he lonely, do

you think, or just fed up of being cooped up all the time?

Talking to Michelle

Again, neither of us had expressed much of a visual response to Andrew's story, but because the puzzle of mental images was uppermost in my mind, I ask Michelle about it straightaway:

Do you think you could let him know about how you imagined any of the things in his story? How you actually imagined them inside your head?

Michelle replies:

He goes into far greater detail - his use of language - I've got pictures in my mind about what's going on, things like: 'but suddenly' it brings action to the story, 'swinging their nets' when they're trying to catch the runaway tiger - a lot more explicit than saying 'they used their nets'... 'They caught him by surprise, they got him by the head and dragged him all the way to the zoo' - that kind of thing.

When I press Michelle to be more visually explicit, by explaining how I often ask children to 'run their own television version inside their heads' while they're listening to a story, she responds:

Well, I'd have liked 'rustling leaves' or something to make you feel that you're in a wood - you know, a few details... birds singing...

She seems to be relying on the words, not so much to activate her own visual imagination, but as a substitute for it, much as Kim and I were doing in our responses to Charles' story. I was to arrive at a clearer perception of why this could be so, when I came to read Iser's book. As Stibbs [1991] comments with reference to Iser:

> 'Reading creates *a feeling of seeing* [my italics] (rather than an image we can scrutinise on the back of the forehead).'
>
> [p.12]

Before I had encountered either Stibbs or Iser, I had written in my 3rd Research Paper:

'...maybe the words are not transformed into visual images but remain as symbolic representations of potential pictures. Maybe the visual impressions are so fleeting that they evade the mind's eye rather than expanding in it.'

I wrote that all our responses to these two stories appeared to be embedded in the words on the page, rather than in the space between the words.

With Rosenblatt's notion of the contribution that a reader can make to a story in mind, I say to Michelle:

One of the other things I'm interested in, is how we bring our own experience from very minimal clues... sometimes, you know, we enlarge upon what is there, we don't expect the writer to do it all. So from all your experience of "woods you have known" as it were...

M: *I live in a wood!'(Laughs)*

P: *So is it likely that that is the wood you would bring from your own experience, letting Andrew know how <u>you</u> pictured the wood. Putting it into <u>your</u> words from the wood you live in might then have helped him to develop what he gives in detail...What kind of things might you share with him about the wood, as <u>you</u> picture it?*

Michelle then recalls some of her memories:

How I see the wood where I live... it's very dark... It's as if you're inside rather than outside because there's so much canopy above you and around you. There's a lot of noise - it's never a quiet place... there's always wind running through the trees. You can see the sun streaming down through the trees sometimes and so there'll be little lit up areas...

I conclude our conversation by commenting:

So really what I'm saying is, I don't think it would be difficult for you to bring some of your memories of a wood you know well, in order to enhance in imagination, the wood in Andrew's story.

Now that I can look back on all the responses that I received, from teachers and from pupils, I am more aware than I was on this occasion, of the considerable variations that different readers reveal, when they are free to express a personal response. Some responses are quite voluntarily very visual, as my next chapter *I Encounter The Knight and the Mushroom*, will reveal. Others may focus more intensively on the reader's feelings, or on their interpretation of what is happening. These variations occur when readers are responding to the same story, so it seems to be at least as much a matter of individual inclinations, as of clues or details in the text. The clearest illustration of such differences occurs in the engaged responses which three Y8 pupils made to *Ice* in Chapter 14.

There remains the issue, however, of the ease with which readers can think in images as a form of experiential response, *if they are encouraged to do so.* Over many years, I have invited groups of primary and secondary pupils - and on in-service courses, groups of teachers - to 'picture think' by transforming words on the page, whether stories or poems, into either a single frame picture or a sequence of pictures. There have only been two occasions on which, once a teacher and once a pupil maintained that they *never* saw pictures inside their heads; in other words, were not aware of possessing a visual imagination.

Mostly, readers seem to welcome the opportunity, *if it is offered* to transform

words on the page first of all into images inside their heads and then secondly into their own words. They are always intrigued by the variations in what the text activates visually in their minds when they come to share their imaginings with each other.

There is a difference, of course, as I now realise, between the *act* of reading a story from start to finish and the *response* that a reader can choose to make once that act is completed - or maybe temporarily suspended. Where the images may flicker in the *process* of reading as the narrative carries us along, we can slow down our *responses* in order to develop our own thoughts, feelings or visual impressions more clearly. I would suggest that this is similar to the way that we can slow down hearing the words on the page in order to bring them into earshot, or our own inner speech, when we want to hear what we are thinking more precisely.

Benton [and Fox [1985] suggest that:

> 'The substance of the secondary world [of a story] ...is made up of a series of more or less formed images... which occur during writing and reading in a rich variety of manifestations.' [p.7]

It would seem worthwhile, therefore, to continue to experiment in the classroom with ways in which these images can be given greater clarity at the response stage - either to pupils' own stories or to those of other writers. However, few, if any, references are made to the role of visual impressions in the assessment of pupils as story writers and readers, an omission which needs to be rectified if aesthetic responses are to be taken into account.

School C

My third set of visits was to a Y5/6 class and I have chosen ten year old Davina's story and the responses that we made to it to illustrate several of the issues which were now coming to the fore and which I discussed with Fiona, the class teacher and school Language Co-ordinator.

As Davina told me on my fourth visit to the school, she was a keen reader of Nancy Drew detective stories which is why she had chosen to have a go at writing such a story herself, called *Murder on the Moor*[2] . It relates how two girl detectives find the body of another girl and track down the killer to 'a boarded up house with weeping dried up dead flowers in the garden.' On a further visit to the moor they find his passport, dropped at the scene of the crime and take it to the police who proceed to arrest the man at his hide-out.

There are huge gaps in the plot (Who is the man? Who is the girl? Why did he kill her?) and it is clear from her own comments that Davina recognises these defects, in part at any rate:

Short for a murder story. Some funny parts but mostly a serious book.I think I could have made it a bit longer on the actual story line.

In my experience, it is not unusual for children of Davina's age or even younger, who are themselves avid readers, to launch into a brave attempt to write a full length novel. I do not believe that they should be deterred from making such efforts. They will learn that managing a complex plot when you are the maker, is considerably more difficult (and time consuming!) than reading somebody else's. This might very well lead to a heightened

[2] In the Appendix at the end of the thesis

awareness of the achievements of professional authors. Treated sympathetically by a teacher, it could also lead to further attempts to write an extended story.

In one respect, Davina has bitten off more than she can chew in setting out to write a complicated detective story, especially in the limited amount of time available. But as our responses indicate, we can still engage with the story as it stands and there are many achievements in the way that she has handled her narrative which merit appreciation. **Davina deserves a positive response to her story just as Dorothy did to *Lost Underground.***

Teacher's response

Reaction to story

I liked the casual way the two friends decided to go for a walk. Jodie seemed more independent than Bess, it was she who noticed the blood, even though Bess stepped in it, and it was she who decided to follow up the tyre prints. I was worried when the girls split up - it seemed a dangerous thing to do when a murderer was on the loose, but Jodie was sensible, she didn't investigate the house by herself but waited until the next day when Bess was with her. I really liked the fact that the characters got all their evidence together, then went to the police. I had the feeling they were used to detective work and were likely to have more adventures!

Appreciation

Starting the story with a conversation was a good idea. It gets the reader straight into the action. You then took a step back, to describe the scene, which worked really well, as you didn't let the reader get confused about what was going on. You used some lovely descriptions to set the scene, both on the moor, then later at the house. The

description of the man going pale, when questioned, gave him away as guilt (I wondered why he murdered her). I particularly liked the way that you returned to the moor on the second day, it really kept the action going.

My response

Reaction to story

I felt really shocked when Bess finds that she has just stepped in some blood! It was such a lovely sunny day up on the moors and then suddenly, everything is changed when they find the murdered girl.
I think Jodie is very sensible not to go into the boarded up house on Crocknut Drive on her own. I wonder whether the questions they asked the man the next day, confirmed their suspicions. It was lucky they found the passport near the place where the body was lying. That seemed to clinch it so that he could be put away.

Appreciation

I like the way you introduce Bess and Jodie at the start of the story - letting us know first of all that they are good friends and then, a bit later, that they are also detectives. Other details that you give us show how sensible they both are, ringing to make arrangements for the removal of the body for instance. They make a good team.
I'm still intrigued by the mystery man and also by the mystery girl.
I like the way that you indicate his guilt when his face goes pale when he realises that the girls are detectives.

Values

Although 'values' were never mentioned specifically in the Guidelines but subsumed under 'thoughts' it interests me that in seeking to make a meaningful personal response, almost without exception the teachers and I always seem to comment on the behaviour of the characters. In *Lost Underground* we comment on Dorothy's kindness and conscientious nature;

in *Tom of Terror Towers* on the quarrel and then the reconciliation between Tom and his Mum; in *The Runaway Tiger* on the tiger's feelings as well as those of the keeper. Now, in *Murder on the Moor*, Fiona explains how she was worried: 'when the girls split up - it seemed a dangerous thing to do.' She comments approvingly on Jodie's sense in not venturing into the apparently empty house on her own. I also commend Jodie's good sense, as well as the earlier behaviour of the two girls in making arrangements for the removal of the body.

Why, I wonder, do we share such 'behavioural' thoughts? I can only assume that it is because, like Rosenblatt [1938], we wish to:

> 'stimulate students themselves to develop a thoughtful approach to human behaviour.' [p.18]

It became evident, in my conversation with Fiona about our personal responses to the children's stories that although *'its very hard to look beyond the obvious writing mistakes that children make'*, she had valued the opportunity that the Guidelines offered to write down a more detailed response about the story itself:

P. Did you feel that actually paying close attention to the story... did highlight or bring to your attention parts of the story that you might not have noticed otherwise?

F. Certainly having to write it down made a difference because you have to structure what you're going to say. In the past, although I've perhaps thought... and I may have made one or two comments - you might say 'Oh yeh, I like this bit' and it's a casual remark... it gets lost doesn't it?

I then raise the issue of the time factor:

P. But there is a time factor isn't there? I mean it took me 10-15 minutes for each child.

J. And we've got 36 children. But you could do a couple each time couldn't you?

P. It's a question of whether you feel it's adding something which is important - educational - for them or not.

J. I think it does - the questions that have come up, questions that are really going to make them think. So rather than picking holes in it - 'You haven't done this, you haven't done that' what happens here is... I'm not just marking it, I'm not just looking at it, I'm interested in it. I'm interested as a reader which means that then when they write another story, they're thinking of their audience.

Conclusion

At this stage in my enquiry, I was encouraged by the responses that all the primary teachers had made to the stories they had chosen using my Guidelines and by the positive comments which they each made in our subsequent discussions. I was also interested, as this chapter has shown, in both the similarities and the variations between the engaged responses which they and I made.

I had yet to work out, though, what the similarities and differences might be between engaged and appreciative responses to the same story. What was the point of keeping them separate? In my next chapter I shall explain how I began to explore their relationship and the value of retaining a distinction between them.

Chapter Four

I encounter *The Knight and the Mushroom*

I received my first story from a secondary Y8 writer early in the summer term, 1995. It came from one of my collaborating teachers who had not been at the January meeting which I describe in Chapter 2. As he had not heard the reservations expressed by the other secondary teachers, maybe that accounted for the fact that he responded first. He not only sent his own response to the story, but also those of all the pupils who were in the same class as Matthew. Chris, the teacher, had written his own version of the Guidelines on the blackboard for the pupils to respond to. Under '**Reacting to the Story**' they were asked to write down:

Any thoughts about the characters and their behaviour
Any thoughts about what's happening
Anything I visualise
Any further thoughts or questions

They were then asked to write an **Appreciation** for Matthew, of 'his achievements as a writer.'

In Chris's blackboard version of the Guidelines, feelings were not mentioned specifically and I was interested to note when I came to read the responses that although many of them offered *thoughts* about the way the knight was feeling, the readers' *own feelings* were only expressed in relation to the mysterious qualities of the nocturnal woodland setting. It was a salutary reminder of how the wording of a task may influence the outcome.

The Knight and the Mushroom

The Knight slowly clambered over a fallen oak tree, its bark as black as oil, its leaves as brown as sand. The knight sat on the gigantic stump where the oak once stood, it was wet and shiny but would do for a short break. He

tied his horse around a nearby birch and sat back down on the stump. The forest by night was very creepy. Branches stooped over like hands trying to grasp passers by, putting the fear of God into them.

It was autumn on the cube world and the leaves were a multitude of colours ranging from green to brown, with many shades of reds and golds between. The multitude of colours still did not take away the creepiness of the forest mingled with the night, and the white moonlight hiding behind the clouds.

As the horse moved a little, the knight heard the crunch of leaves under its hooves. In the middle of the area where the tree had fallen, two mushrooms had grown through - normal white mushrooms, which the knight had seen before with witches. This concluded his theory that they might be safe to eat.

The knight walked towards the two mushrooms, hearing the final screams of the leaves beneath his feet. He bent down slowly, determined not to pull a muscle in his back. When he'd bent down far enough, he grabbed one mushroom by its supporting stalk. The mushroom came out with no problems at all. He put it in his pouch and grabbed the other mushroom. He pulled hard. Nothing happened. The mushroom stood tall and proud. He grabbed his pick axe from his belt and chipped stone away from around the mushroom. The knight pulled again, the mushroom stood still.

The knight sat back down on the stump and started throwing stones at the mushroom. The first stone bounced wide. The second skimmed the mushroom. The third, however, hit the mushroom with force.
"Ouch!" a sound came.
The knight sharply jumped up and looked around with his beady white eyes for the cause of the noise. There was no sign of anything nearby. The knight turned around and continued to throw stones at the mushroom. He hit the mushroom again.

"Ouch!"
This time, the knight stood up and had a wander around to see what was making the noise.
"Who's out there? Is anybody there?"
The knight's frustrated voice was met with the silence of the night. Again he sat down and threw more stones. He hit the mushroom again.
"Ouch!"
The knight realised that the noise was coming from the mushroom. Curiously, he walked over to the mushroom, The knight bent down to the mushroom. He extended his right hand and slapped the mushroom.
"Ow! What did you do that for?"
The mushroom's voice was high pitched and anger was in its voice.
"Oh my God!"
The knight was shocked.
"Don't take that attitude," said the mushroom fairly loudly.
"What are you?" said the knight, calming down.
"I am Terrypolinich, but you can call me Terry," said the mushroom, also calming down.
The mushroom asked a question: "I can sense people's memories... what are you doing here?"
"I've been banished from my castle. I want to find a place to stay. Will you help me?"
The knight could not believe that he was asking the mushroom a question.
"As long as you don't eat me," the mushroom said.
"I promise," said the knight.
"OK," the mushroom said.
The mushroom jumped out of the hole. The knight opened his satchel and the mushroom jumped in.

Visual impressions

At the start of my 5th Research Paper, I recall some of the questions that had come to mind when I was puzzling over our responses to *Tom at Terror Towers* and *The Runaway Tiger* :

* To what extent do the words in the text symbolise an image without transforming themselves into a visual representation?

* To what extent are the images in the mind's eye merely fleeting impressions?

* To what extent do the words act as 'clues' which enable readers to' fill in the gaps' with pictures of their own?

Now, for the first time, I had 33 pupil responses to a story, as well as those that the teacher, myself and another colleague had contributed. As I read them through, I was immediately struck by the various ways in which our visual imaginations had been activated:

Telling but not showing:

I can visualise the forest very well and enjoyed picturing the knight's facial expression when he was shocked.

The person who wrote this gave a really good description of the forest, it really gives you a good image in your head.

The story was set well, you could really place everything that was happening, what the light was like and the kind of looks the knight had on his face.

Comments such as these from the pupils suggested to me that maybe, they were relying on the words of the story for what they 'felt they saw' [Stibbs, 1991] rather than transforming them into pictures. Or maybe the images were too fleeting to coalesce. These readers do not, however, refer specifically to any words or phrases from the text.

There is one instance in the teacher's response and one in the response of

my other colleague, which do refer specifically to particular words in connection with their visual impact.

Chris writes:

I wasn't quite sure what you meant by the term 'cube-world', but to me it suggested a future planet, and certainly I could then picture in my mind that it was an unusual and maybe even disturbing landscape.

Pat S. writes:

You use words very cleverly. I enjoyed 'multitude' which suggests the magnitude of all the colours and also their variety.

Filling in the gaps from the 'clues'

More commonly, personal responses to this story suggest an *enlargement* upon the description provided by Matthew.

One pupil wrote:

I could visualise the characters how I wanted to, as the knight wasn't over explained and the mushroom was quite easy to visualise.

Here are three examples of how pupils envisaged the scene imaginatively through contributing additional details:

I can visualise a huge forest clearing, with a huge oak tree stump coming out of the ground in the middle of the clearing. I can see tall and fat bushy trees and bushes and also dark clouds and a half moon behind them.

I can visualise this scene being an isolated, cold forest with just trees covering any lurking danger, and a lone knight with all his armour, clambering on a fallen oak tree. I visualise the forest being very old, with many dead objects of nature all around.

I can see the scene being in a fantasy-storyland type of

forest, with the knight having shining silver armour and a long shining sword. I can visualise the forest being very battered, old and taken away from all signs of civilisation. I can see the forest covered in fog, which closes off the sunlight; it's a mystery how plants and trees live. I see the oak as being gnarled and twisted even though only the stump was left.

Images which evoke feeling or mood

This was an aspect of visualising that I had not considered before as a form of meaningful personal response but there were many examples in the pupils' responses of how feelings and images or images and a sense of atmosphere could merge:

I imagine the knight to be very down in the dumps with a grumpy face, until he sees the mushroom who surprises him.

I can visualise the forest very well and enjoyed picturing the knight's facial expression when he was shocked.

I can visualise the look on the knight's face when he realises the mushroom is talking. I think he looks amazed, pleased and shocked at the same time. I can also visualise the part where the horse moved a little; the knight heard the crunch of leaves under its hooves. This gave the story an unsettled atmosphere.

I can really visualise the moods of this story. I can feel the moonlight, the trees, the leaves and the creepiness,,,

I saw the trees as if they were angry people. I could feel/see the darkness... I could feel the loneliness that the knight would have felt...

When the knight first enters the forest, I really can visualise the atmosphere of the scene and his surprised expression when the mushroom talks for the first time.

Visual influences from television and video

It had never occurred to me to think of the story in anything other than literary terms. In fact, I have to confess that I had slipped somewhat from my own insistence that only positive comments should be made in our responses, when I wrote in my appreciation:

The dialogue is much flatter though [than the strongly poetical feel of the opening paragraph], really quite banal by comparison: "Ouch" and "Ow" and especially "You can call me Terry"! Suddenly I'm in more of an Enid Blyton world than one that could have been created by Tolkien or Ursula Le Guin.

Where I draw on books in making my personal response, several of the pupils draw on more visual media, especially animated cartoons.

I can see a large mushroom and the knight trying to pull the mushroom out of the ground, like a cartoon.

The characters seem rather cartoon-like. It's too unrealistic to be taken seriously.

In my mind's eye I saw the mushroom as a weird cartoon character and the knight as one dressed up in armour with his visor down, maybe stuck. He has succeeded in showing it's a fantasy story.

Where the knight is generally perceived as a lonely character, banished from his castle and deserving sympathy, the mushroom is perceived more as a cheeky little chappy:

I liked the way the mushroom had a lot of bossiness in its character for just a small mushroom.

I think the mushroom sounds really quite cocky but brings

humour to the story.

The voice of the mushroom would be child-like, almost like a Disney animation in a film like *Beauty and the Beast* or like the talking teapot...

Where I had been jarred by what I perceived in my personal response as a dissonance between two kinds of literary text, these twelve year olds seem to be quite comfortable with the shift in tone, once the mushroom starts to speak. Indeed now that Disney films had been brought to my attention, I could imagine how both the behaviour of the characters and the scenery of *The Knight and the Mushroom* might easily take on the qualities of an animated film, in much the same way as I had imagined *The Good Wizard and the Bad Witch* in the Prologue.

I struggle to clarify the inter-relatedness of my two categories of response

At this stage in my research, I was still struggling with what it was exactly that could be said to distinguish my two categories of response with respect to their 'meaningfulness' - and at the same time what it was that they retained in common. I was clear that both kinds of response must be focused on the particularities of the story and as a result of my discussions with the secondary teachers in January and my reading of the primary responses, I could now see that both kinds of response were intended to be meaningful for the pupil writer to whom they were addressed.

In my 4th Research Paper, reflecting on the primary responses I had written: 'Although I have tried to make a distinction between focusing the reader's attention initially on the story itself, before 'stepping outside' to consider the writer's handling of the narrative, it is now clearer to me how in each case, the audience for the responses is undoubtedly the writer. In this respect, the reader has the writer in mind when she is reacting to the story, just as she

does when she is more directly appreciating the writer's achievements. Her feedback on what she has 'made' of the story, is intended both to acknowledge its meaningfulness, to give it fully fledged story status and to let the writer know what the reader has enjoyed or found intriguing, thus helping to develop a sense of audience.

Similarly, although the response to the second category is focused on the writer's handling of the narrative, this cannot be dissociated from the content of the story. In these respects my categories are two sides of the same coin.'

But if, in each kind of response, the reader is attending both to the story and to the writer, what is to differentiate them?

Fiona evidently had this problem about Davina's story, when she says to me: *One of the biggest things that stood out for me was this wonderful image of them walking on the moor with the breeze, it really got the picture of the place. I was about to write it in response to the story, and I thought well, now, it's really how I got the picture - I've got this picture because you have written it this way. So I decided it was really a response to the writer.*'

A possible feature that could distinguish my second kind of meaningful response from the first, while still retaining a close connection with both the story and the writer, became apparent in the Appreciations which the two secondary teacher colleagues and the pupils made to *The Knight and the Mushroom.* Between them, they referred explicitly or implicitly to a whole range of crafting components:

<u>There were the appreciations of how the writer had handled the *description*:</u>

The way Matthew has built up the story, he has succeeded in building up a very believable sense of place.

I love the descriptions. They are to the point and don't go on for ever.

You manage to create your effects by not labouring your descriptions...

Then there were several references to *character*:

Very real characters who almost come to life on paper without becoming too exaggerated...

I think he has built up the characters well but not let us know more than we need to know.

I think he has succeeded in achieving a contrast of two characters, one like a large, imposing, strong -willed character and the mushroom a small relaxed character.

He has managed to create two very different characters and has built contrasts between them.

There were also several references to *pace*:

I think he has managed to keep the reader interested by not introducing the character of the mushroom too soon.

I liked the way you kept the pace of the story quite slow. I found I could concentrate on each detail of events.

The way you held up the story when the knight was trying to work out where the noises were coming from.

I appreciate the boldness of the writer in taking good time to set the scene and also the way he lingers over the preparations for picking the mushroom.

In addition, there were also references to *dialogue*, *dual viewpoint*, *imagery* and *rhythm*. I note in my 5th Research Paper: 'All in all, six or seven different narrative devices were either mentioned directly or inferred - all of which *refer specifically to details in the story.*'

Grasping at these references to narrative devices as a way of distinguishing my second category of response from the first, did for a time misleadingly suggest to me that the first was about the 'what' of the story and the second about the 'how'. This was coming closer again to Purves's concept of Perception as focusing on the construction of the narrative unrelated to the effect that the story had had on the reader.

The missing link

What I had still to fit fully into place, was the realisation that in focusing on aspects of how the writer had succeeded in handling the narrative (what I came to map, once all the Appreciations had been received, as the crafting components), it was essential, if the response was to retain its meaningfulness, for the reader not to lose sight of her own *experience* of the story. The aesthetic inter-relatedness of the two responses, as I realised later and explain in Chapter 10, lay in the references to how the narrative construction had enabled that *virtual* text to be evoked.

I think that it was this next set of observations about the pupils' responses to *The Knight and the Mushroom* which led me closer to this crucial realisation.

Connections between the pupils' own reactions to the story and their appreciations of Matthew's achievements as a writer

I was particularly interested to observe how focusing on *their own* responses to *The Knight and the Mushroom* first, seemed to support these twelve year olds, when they then directed their attention to the writer's achievements - as they are required to do for the Key Stage 3 English Tests and in GCSE. On the one hand they were able to be specific about some of the techniques

which had helped them to relate to the story - and although in every case their appreciations were shorter than their initial 'engaged' responses, the comments which they made drew upon the more detailed references to the text which they had already given when describing their own reactions to it. In other words, *formulating the first response* enabled the second response to relate more meaningfully to technical details; the first response also illuminated the second, in a way that provided useful evidence of the reader's understanding of the text.

Let me conclude this chapter by offering three of these responses in full, as evidence for this claim:

Sally

Reacting to the story

The knight seems to be lonely and unhappy. He seems solemn and lost. He acts like any normal human would who had been thrown out of their home. He discovers a friend who he can trust in the character of the Mushroom. The mushroom seems quite clever and strict. In some cases he seems insecure but he wants to try and help the knight because he wants a friend himself. I think that the story line is very interesting because of a mushroom helping a knight, which doesn't happen in other stories. I also think it is very original and I like the idea of the mushroom being the hero instead of the knight.

I can visualise a large forest, in which the knight and his horse have got lost. I can see a large mushroom and the knight trying to pull the mushroom out of the ground like a cartoon. I can also see the way that the two become good friends and help one another.

I like the way that the story is different to other knight stories by using the mushroom as the hero instead of the knight and I also like the way that it is still original.

Appreciation

I think Matthew has managed to keep the reader interested

by not introducing the character of the mushroom too soon. He has also managed to create questions about what happens next. He has put in a lot of description about the scenery so that you can visualise it quite easily. He has managed to create two very different characters and he has built contrasts between them. He has managed to make the story original but different in its own way.

Craig

Reacting to the story

I feel that the knight is a very serious person who does not have that much of an open mind. Someone who would be sceptical of what happened to him and look for logical explanations.
I think that the mushroom is a sort of joker who likes to be or acts funny.
But from the knight's actions, it seems as though he's tired, so he'll believe anything, as long as he can find somewhere to stay.
I visualise the scene to be in quite a dark, dense forest with lots of dense trees - apart from where they are. They are in a clearing.
I think the story is probably supposed to be a humorous fantasy/fiction story.

Appreciation

I think he has successfully achieved a good picture of the forest. I can visualise the forest well at the start and then throughout the rest of the story, he has not let it get in the way too much.
I think he has built up the characters well but not let us know more than we need to know.

Laura

Reacting to the story

You can see that the knight is very persistent, by the way he keeps tugging at the second mushroom but maybe he isn't as heroic as knights are normally, because he doesn't want to pull a muscle in his back. I think that the mushroom,

although small, is very confident and proud. You can tell because of the way he stands and the way that he just introduces himself without being nervous.
The knight has been banished from his castle, so wanders off to the forest. When he sees the two mushrooms he decides he could eat them. So he pulled one out of the ground and tries to pull up the other. He takes it for granted that he can eat the mushrooms. When he starts throwing stones because he's bored, he realises the mushroom can talk. After having a short conversation, he discovers that the mushroom can sense people's memories. The knight asks if the mushroom will help him. He says he will, so he hops into the knight's bag.
I can really visualise the moods in this story. I can feel the moonlight, the trees, the leaves and the creepiness in the first section. I can really picture the first scene well but I can't really get into the knight's conversation with the mushroom because there isn't much description. But I don't think it needs it.

Appreciation

I think Matthew has done very well in this story. I really like the way that things just happen and an explanation isn't forced down your throat. I like that because it suits this kind of fantasy - and often things don't have explanations. I really like the way that the knight's and the mushroom's thoughts aren't given. By their actions you can tell what they're thinking. I love the descriptions. They are to the point and don't go on forever, explaining and describing every point.

Chapter Five

Responses to three further stories written by secondary pupils

Rosenblatt [1985] makes the point that:

> 'We need many more studies centred on the actual literary transaction or reading event.' [p.44]

I had waited with growing impatience for the stories and their responses to them which the other secondary teachers had promised to send to me. Eventually, by the end of the summer term, 1995, these had arrived. In this chapter I shall consider the 'literary transactions' which the teachers and I made to three further stories using the following Guidelines:

Guidelines - fourth version

RESPONDING AS A STORY READER TO THE STORIES YOUR PUPILS WRITE
TWO POSSIBLE RESPONSES

REACTING TO THE STORY

As you read, your attention is focused on the story itself. You are attending closely to what the story is about - to how you feel about the characters and their behaviour, to any thoughts you might have about what is happening in the story, to how you visualise either the characters or the setting - and to any questions or speculations that come into your mind, especially if this is your first encounter with the story. In other words, what are you making of the story inside your own head?

APPRECIATING THE WRITER'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Turn your attention now to the writer, and to how the writer has handled the narrative which comprises the story. Because this is an appreciation and not a criticism or an evaluation, concentrate on what the writer has succeeded in doing (not on what s/he could, in your opinion, do better). Relate your comments on the writer's achievements to specific details in the story; avoid generalisations and assessment type jargon.

AUDIENCE

Remember you are making these comments to the pupil, to let her (or him) know a) your personal reactions to the story; b) your recognition of whatever skills s/he has shown as a story writer.

The stories were all produced by 12-13 year old pupils in Y8. This seemed to be the Year in Key Stage 3, when story writing was included in schemes of work. Two of the stories are reproduced in full; reluctantly, I have summarised Ben's story, *The Deceiver*, which was in fact the longest story in the whole collection, running to ten A4 pages. The pupils in all three secondary classes were also asked by their teachers to respond 'as story readers' to their own stories so I have included their comments as well as ours. It is interesting to reflect on what they 'made' of their own stories. In Chapter 7 I shall focus on some of the broader issues which arose when I returned to the schools to discuss with the teachers the kind of responses we had made.

First, then, here is the story that Tara wrote about her stay in hospital:

Tonsillitis attack by Tara

I awakened with a nurse by my side. She told me that I was not to eat or drink anything because I was having my operation in the evening. The operation was to have my tonsils out and I wasn't feeling too brave about going. She also told me that my mum had gone home and that she will be back at 10.00 am.

The time came, my mum was there. The nurse came over to me and kept hitting my hand trying to find my vein. She found the vein and put a blob of cream on it; she also put some clear tape. I gathered that's where she would put the needle when I go down to theatre.

The nurse told me to put my head back and try and relax. Hours had passed and the nurse woke me up to tell me I was

going down to theatre - laid on my back, watching the lights flash past. The last thing I can remember is the injection going into my arm and then counting 1,2,3 up my arm.

I awakened after 24 hours and I couldn't talk. My throat was really sore and it didn't feel like anything was missing. Before I went down the nurse said that I might have to have gromits. I was relieved, because I really liked swimming and if I had gromits, I would have had to wear a swimming hat.

Then the next day came [and] I went home. I still couldn't talk very well but I was glad to be in my own bed.

Pupil's response

I haven't got no feeling about the characters as the only character is me. My behaviour is quite good I think. The picture I could see in my mind the most, is when I was laid on my back going down to theatre. I can remember quite clearly the nurse telling me where I was going.
I think my story's really rubbish.
I had to decide where certain bits fitted in with what I was writing.
I'm not sure if I made any changes in my revision stage, as I made lots of changes as I wrote my story in best.
I hate my story and I think I should have chosen a different thing to write about.I'm not entirely happy with the whole thing.

Teacher's response

Reacting to the story

I wonder what it feels like to be banned from eating! I very rarely lose my appetite.
I've never had any operation, except for a tooth extraction. That was nerve-racking enough.
What I have in mind as I read is the disinfectant smell of hospitals, people moving purposefully around and sick people in wards.

Appreciation

I'm impressed by one or two details that make me realise how the memory works. One is the bit where you remember having your hand slapped to find the vein. The other is where you can see only the lights on the ceiling.
There's also the tension of you waiting for the big moment. I have felt that apprehension and think that you have caught it well. There's a feeling I get that this really happened: it's not made up.

My response

Reacting to the story

I've never had my tonsils out, but I can imagine how very sore your throat must feel when you come round from the operation - almost too painful to swallow. I've just had a sore throat from having a cold - and that was bad enough!
I can just picture one of those long hospital corridors, with you laid flat on your back on the trolley, watching light after light flash past you as you look up at the ceiling.
You must have been feeling very nervous, knowing that at last you were on the way to the operating theatre - especially as you hadn't had the injection yet that would send you off to sleep.
What are gromits by the way?

Appreciation

I like the way you lead up to the operation so gradually - all that long day to have to wait through before the big moment arrives. I think it's appropriate that two thirds of your story is taken up with describing what happened before your tonsils were removed.
I also like the way you say 'my throat was really sore and it didn't feel like anything was missing'. This certainly helps me to imagine how there didn't seem to be any extra space - even though you'd had your tonsils removed. Quite the reverse in fact!I expect that you can still recall the feeling quite vividly.

The detail about the nurse hitting your hand to try to find the vein also creates a strong sense of a real event.

Commentary

The writer's vulnerability

In spite of the fact that she had clearly put some thought into her story and into the way she told it, Tara does not seem to have gained much satisfaction out of writing about her hospital experience - and I cannot think that the reason was because the experience was an unpleasant one. Often the stories that we tell most often and elaborate at some length, are about things that happened to us that were unpleasant in real life.

When I talked to Tara about her story, her discontent seemed to be more to do with how she felt about it in comparison with some of the others that had been read out loud in class:

After reading some of the others, some other people in our class, mine just felt like it was quite slowish compared to everybody else's.

In fact in my appreciation for Tara of the way she had written her story, I commented specifically on the slowness of the pace at which the experience was recounted, as I felt that it conveyed how time must have dragged throughout the day as she was waiting, no doubt in some trepidation, to be taken down to theatre. Maybe this could offer her a new perspective on her story which will boost her confidence as a writer. Pupils need to be shown what they have achieved for other readers, as well as what they could try for next.

When I asked her whether she had been pleased by anything that either Andy or I had commented on, it is her teacher's reference to 'the tension

of you waiting for the big moment' that she mentions along with my visual impression of the hospital corridor which chimes in with what she could see most clearly in her own mind:

I like the bit where he says he could really catch the tension while I was waiting - and you said you could picture me in this corridor as I was going along - that bit was good.

If she is to tackle her next go at story writing with some confidence, I would suggest that sharing with Tara the ways in which her story had become personally meaningful for us could make an important contribution to how she might approach the task. Too often, pupils are inclined to dismiss their efforts as 'rubbish' in order, maybe, to avoid further criticism. But if they can see that a story of theirs has meant something to another reader, then they may be encouraged to look again at their story more positively, with a greater sense of achievement.

The reader's contribution

Whilst making our responses independently of each other, Andy and I both seek to relate Tara's tonsillectomy to the nearest thing in our own experience (a tooth extraction and a sore throat) which we both acknowledge is nowhere near so stressful. Thus we treat her operation seriously as an appropriate choice for a story. Andy also indicates how reading her account called to mind the impersonal, medicated atmosphere of a hospital. I empathise with Tara's feelings which I can imagine even though I have never been in that situation.

Significant details

Both of us comment on the same two details (the nurse hitting Tara's hand to try and find the vein and the lights on the corridor ceiling) and explain to

Tara *why they worked for us*. For Andy, they 'make me realise how memory works'; for me both of them 'create a strong sense of a real event'. In addition, I pick out what Tara says about the way she remembered her throat feeling when she came round and comment: 'this helps me to imagine how there didn't seem to be any extra space.'

Ben's story *The Deceiver*,[1] as the title suggests, is a tale of how one supposed friend betrayed another and put his friend's life at risk in doing so. It is a story of high adventure with many twists and turns and changes of scene before the villain is run to ground and the smuggling racket in which he is involved is uncovered.

Pupil's response

Involvement

When I wrote my story, the involvement I had with it was about the same as the involvement I have when I'm reading a story. I almost care for the characters and hope they make it through the story all right. This affects me slightly when I'm writing, because I always want the good characters to live and the bad ones to die - if it's that sort of story. For example, in my story all the good people survive and the bad people die.
When I read and write a story, I make a vision of it in my head. I build up a detailed picture of what's going on. This is what I did when I wrote my story. I made a picture and then added speech and stuff.

How the story was written

When I wrote my story, I appreciated the skills by writing a bit and then stepping back and looking at it. From there I can look at the structure and add little details. I keep doing this until I am happy with it. When I'm writing, I use the help from the knowledge of what other writers have

[1] In the Appendix at the end of the thesis

done, so I know roughly where I should put the touches... for instance, where it says 'It smelt worse than the gutter' this means that Belrick was right and that the pub was horrible and that that part of the town was really horrible.

Visualising the story

Before I give the responses that Ben's teacher Kevin and I made to *The Deceiver*, let me offer a few comments on Ben's response. His was one of the most visual stories that I received and I'm interested in his own description here of how he 'builds up a detailed picture of what's going on.'

When I asked him if he was interested in what someone else was seeing when they read his story he said:

Oh yeh, quite a lot, 'cos like, I know that everyone sort of like visualises everything completely differently when they're reading a story - well, not completely, but quite different...

We agree that we both formed clear pictures of the beach and the cave and later on the cellar in which Francis meets his end. I then asked Ben whether he had formed clear pictures of anything that I hadn't mentioned in my response and he replies:

Like in the alleys and stuff - I've got really good pictures of that - and when at the beginning he steps out of the boat into the clear sun and looks at the sails. I could just imagine the sun just poking round the sails and glaring in his eyes. 'Cos it's dark down in the hold... and then it's all light.

Ben had been given the same set of Guidelines that his teacher had used, which are really addressed to another reader rather than the writer himself. Appreciating your own skills is quite a tricky business but I like the way Ben tackles it. Again the image of an artist comes to mind, roughing out the main

shapes of the scene on the canvas and then stepping back, brush in hand, to take a second look before adding the precise details which will complete the picture.

The time factor

In a final comment from our conversation, Ben acknowledges that teachers with thirty stories to read will not have the time to make the kind of lengthy and detailed response that I have made to his story:

.So when they write "the structure's good" "the characters are good" and so on, that is sort of like quite helpful 'cos even though it's quite rough, it's still really helpful. It gives you an indication of what you're doing wrong and what you're doing right 'cos they haven't got enough time to write all of this.

However, when I ask him:

How would you feel, say, if Mr E. put you in a group when everyone had completed their stories, where you had three of your mates in the class, and you all made this kind of response to each other's stories - and let those people know how you'd seen it and what you'd made of it in your own head. Would you be interested in some detailed responses from your own mates?

Ben says enthusiastically:

Oh yeh, that's what I'd like to do - 'cos I was thinking like when we'd finished it would be really good if we could read everyone else's story and then tell them what we think of it and stuff. I'd really like to do that 'cos everyone spent so much time on it.

Teacher's response

Involvement

I was very taken with this story, Ben. It reminded me strongly of *Treasure Island* - one of my favourites. Have you read it? I visualised the scenes in the pub and in the harbour like the King Street/Welsh Back area of Bristol. Do

you know it? It's supposed to be where Stevenson set Long John Silver's pub in *Treasure Island*.
I liked the way you described the characters. Again, I could visualise them. Another book I associated with it was *Moonfleet* by J. Meade Faulkner. Belrick reminded me of Elzevir Block in that novel.
The thing that gave me difficulty, though, was the dialogue. Because the descriptions of place and people were so clear and authentic, I found the "Arnie Schwartzenegger" phrasing too modern and jarring.

Appreciation
I've started on this in the previous section. I really liked the description of character and place. Very powerful! The shape of the story was satisfying too, and you rounded it off well with the news report.'

As will become clear in the conversation with Kevin that I record in Chapter 7, in using my Guidelines for the first time, his understanding of reader 'involvement' is not what he *makes* of Ben's story inside his own head, so much as what it *reminds* him of, hence his references to *Treasure Island* and *Moonfleet*. When it comes to the Appreciation, although Ben had produced a remarkably sustained story, in spite of the suggestion in the Guidelines to 'Relate your comments on the writer's achievements to specific details in the story', his teacher's comments are still confined to a few fairly general observations.

My response

Reacting to the story
There are certain moments in the story that I can picture quite clearly: when Francis is standing below the ridge of rock at the back of the cave, for instance, preparing to leave in the row boat through the opening that leads to the sea, with the stalactites dripping overhead.
I can also picture the cellar, stacked with casks of

whisky, in which the final killing takes place, with the rickety staircase and its two broken steps and a crumpled body at its base.
I find the contrast between the darkness and the light very striking through the whole tale: the dark, narrow alleyways of the small port contrasting with the glare of the mid-day sun on the beach - which also contrasts with the dim watery light of the cave.
Francis is the kind of villain for whom I feel no pity, first of all seeking to make his friend a victim in his place, and then lying in his teeth about the alleged rape in order to cover up his smuggling activities.
I like the way that Belrick and the narrator of the tale become firm friends, when it looked as though they were going to become sworn enemies. Quite the opposite of what Francis had planned happens, as they unite to track him down.
I'm not entirely sure of the historical period, although I associate smuggling with the eighteenth century. The references to swords and breastplates threw me a bit, as they could suggest an earlier medieval period. And was it whisky that was smuggled across from France, or brandy?

Appreciation

What I liked about the way you wrote the story

I am impressed with the number of twists and turns which you incorporate into the plot before a conclusion is reached with the three deaths. Initially, it is the betrayed friend who is in danger of his life from the avenging Belrick. Then Belrick in turn, is threatened in the cave with Francis's pistol before the latter escapes out to sea. The rediscovery of the rowboat hidden in the seaweed of the shore a few days later, brings us back to the darkest alleyways of the port - and to the filthy Cannon Ball Inn from which the landlord makes his escape, only to lead his two pursuers to the secret cellar, from which, at last, there is no escape.
You have created a strong sense of place throughout, which enables me as a reader to move from one scene to the next without getting confused.

You also make effective use of dialogue to explain what is happening and what is about to happen next. In the case of Francis, his words also give us some sense of the man's character, as he first of all lies whenever it suits him, and then later reveals how he despises those he lied to. I don't know whether this is deliberate, but to me there is a hung over feeling about the whole tale from start to finish which inclines me to the view that strong drink plays an important part in the plot - not just as an incentive for smuggling, but as a drug which can cause men to kill when they are 'under the influence'.

This is one of the longest responses that I made to any pupil's story, but it was in response to one of the longest stories that I received and the more I thought about it, the more there was to say. I notice, now, how in the Appreciation, I was already fulfilling all three requirements that render it 'personally meaningful': **it refers in detail to the *story*, it is addressed directly to the *writer* and it relates his handling of the narrative to how I experienced the story *as a reader*.**

In my reactions to the story, as well as sharing with the writer how I envisaged particular scenes, I comment personally from an ethical point of view on the behaviour of the characters in the same way that the primary teachers and I responded to the stories given as examples in Chapter 3. It would certainly appear that expressions of value are characteristic features of an aesthetic or personally meaningful transaction with a text. As I have previously observed [p.59], although the reader's and the writer's values were never mentioned specifically in any versions of the Guidelines, nevertheless they keep putting in an appearance.

In my Appreciation, I feed back to Ben the 'twists and turns' that he has

accomplished in his extended narrative in a way that I hope will foreground his handling of the plot and the ways in which it moves the reader forwards to the final resolution. I am also explicit about the different functions that his use of dialogue has served in enabling me to relate to what is happening in the story.

It was particularly difficult to choose one story for this chapter, out of the four which Kate gave to me from her Y8 class - the same group who had used an earlier version of the Guidelines to respond to *The-Child-Who-Was-Tired* in the previous Autumn Term. At a later stage in my thesis I shall make detailed references to *Crying Wolf*, *Stranded* and *Nowhere To Go* but I offer Amy's story in full here because in many respects it was the most accomplished and moving story that I received.

Gone! by Amy

The chief wiped his fingers on a rag, leaving it stained red with the paint that was already smeared all over my tanned skin.

"There, Sarik, you're a man now."

All the ceremonies of manhood were over, Rolak and I were ready to go on our deciding journey deep into the jungle. We stood at the edge of the mass of dark trees which had been part of our life for fourteen years now, but today from early this morning they seemed unusually dark and scary. I looked back at the tribal village so serene and still, yet so full of life. My mother was lazing in the woven hammock in the shade of the hut, my father was preparing to go out hunting, gathering his bow and poison arrows which were scattered around on the dusty floor. I took a deep breath and headed into the sacred forest.

The sound of overpowering screeches and squawks, hums and

hisses, and the howl of a monkey in the tree above my head. First the sound seems to come out of nowhere, then you look closely and you start to see animals - everywhere! Rolak was walking behind me as we cut through the lush green jungle, it's like a maze, mysterious, exciting, scary. After about an hour of walking, the rain came. First just drip, drip , drip, then we had to stop and stand under a large plant to shelter us.

The rain seemed to last forever, so we picked off two of the massive leaves from the plant and carried on walking. The leaves were heavy and my back ached as we ran. Everything was flashing past, just a long streak of green. I saw a log in front of me, but it was too late. I was going too fast to stop - I tripped and fell in the mud. Rolak laughed.

"It's not funny!" I screamed, "Help me up!"

He pulled me up. I was covered in brown mud, I felt sick, I wanted to go back but we'd come too far and it was getting late if we wanted to be back by dark. We took a few more steps into the forest, and there it was - what we'd come for, the Yanim tree, its bright purple fruits shining in the sunlight! We sat at the foot of the grand tree and fell asleep.

We were woken by a deafening sound which soon faded depressingly into the distance. I jumped up and grabbed Rolak. We each took a handful of fruits and ran into the dark forest. I was frightened. A black mist seemed to haunt the trees - I was so scared, there was darkness swamping my mind. We just ran.

Suddenly I saw a light, a bright light. "The village," I said, "it must be the village!" I grabbed Rolak's arm, so tight it hurt my hand as well as his arm. As we got closer, we realised it wasn't the village, it was a clearing - but we hadn't passed any clearings on the way. We stopped at the edge of the trees and just stared. Torn leaves formed a

carpet on the bare ground. Tree stumps were all that were left, apart from the dead and dying animals. I approached a baby sloth which was lying down still gripping a broken branch. I lifted it up, then quickly placed it back as something else caught my eye. It was a Uakari monkey with its bright red head. I knew it wouldn't survive long as it only ate the fruits of trees which had gone - but there was nothing I could do. I had to leave it there.

I couldn't believe it was real, I wanted to die. Who could have done this? It couldn't have been a tribe as we all live in harmony with the forest and have respect for it. I felt trapped, I wanted to stand and scream "Why?" Tears streamed down my face. 'Sarik, stop!' I told myself 'Remember you are a man now.' I thought back to what the chief had said. I wiped away my tears, took a deep breath and went to see Rolak.

Whilst I had been exploring this place of death and darkness, he had just stood, staring beyond the hill at the forest. I joined him and with one glance back, we began to walk down the hill, then we began to jog, then suddenly we were running, getting faster and faster. I collapsed at the foot of the hill, panting and exhausted. I threw myself out of the way as Rolak fell where I had just been lying. We stayed there till we caught our breath. The mud that I had fallen in before had dried and was beginning to crack and peel.

I knew where we were now, I'd been here before. The plants and animals were familiar; this comforted me slightly but I was still frightened. After what we'd seen at the clearing, we were ready to come across other things just as bad. We walked through the trees which were still dripping from the rain. I wanted to lay my heavy head on my mother's lap but I knew I couldn't. "I'm an adult, I have to be strong," I kept telling myself, "I can't be a child again."

I relaxed a little as we approached the village, but I couldn't help noticing that it was unusually quiet as we

were just a few metres away. I ignored this, I suppose I didn't want to think about it. My father had promised to send a party out to greet us. "Maybe we're late, so they've given up waiting and gone back..." I tried to comfort myself and Rolak. "Yes! That's it, that's why it's so quiet - because they're worried!" I hoped I was right.

Filling myself with hope, we stepped through the last trees - and stopped. I saw my mother's empty hammock gently swaying with the breeze, my father's bows and arrows scattered on the ground as they were this morning. There were no children playing or adults working, just a deadly silence.

Pupil's response

Involvement

I think Rolak in my story was quieter than Sarik and when they found the destroyed area he was shocked and found it hard to take in, unlike Sarik who went straight to help the injured animals. The Chief was superior and was looked up to by the other characters. I think the parents had quite sexist roles - the father goes hunting and the mother lies in a hammock or cooks.
I can picture the scene when Sarik and Rolak arrive at the deserted village. They are stood at the edge of the trees, staring at a few huts containing hammocks, empty pots etc. on the sandy ground. This part interests me most. When I started to write, I didn't know this would be the ending. It just happened, and I think it lets you imagine what happens next.

How the story was written

As I was writing, I had to decide which sentences and words I liked and which to delete. I think in some parts I spent too long on a non-important part of the story.
My first draft of the story was totally different to the final one. I changed the storyline a lot. It started off with three girls but I decided that having boys would be more accurate because of their sexist roles.

I am quite pleased with the describing parts of my story. Also I like the beginning and end of my story.
If I had more time and information, I would have liked to be more accurate about finding out about tribes in the Rain Forest and their traditions.

The Time Factor again

It is clear from Amy's comments that she has taken the composition of this story very seriously, giving it much time and thought as her ideas grew and changed over a period of weeks. Her teacher, Kate, gives her Y8 class the most extended period of any teacher I know, in which to write their stories - at least a whole term. Over the three years that I have been privileged to read the final products of many of these pupils, the quality as well as the commitment has been outstanding. I compare the time span allowed for Amy's *Gone!*, and Jason's *Crying Wolf*, and Anouska's *Nowhere To Go*, and Sam's *Stranded* with the 30-45 minutes allowed for story writing in the KS2 and 3 SATs. There is no way in which the most enthusiastic story writers could achieve what these pupils have achieved in the pathetic amount of time available in these 'tests', and yet they are assessed on those limited outcomes as if they were an adequate reflection of their abilities!

The teacher's response to Amy's story

Involvement

Your story starts off in quite a light-hearted way and I am immediately immersed in Sarik's world. It all seems very exciting - the idea of a "deciding journey" leading into manhood. Although it's obviously a challenge for them both, they run into the jungle sure of a safe return. The atmosphere of the jungle is strong with vivid colours and "overpowering sounds".
When Sarik falls over, I am aware of the fine line between childhood and adulthood. His childish cry "It's not funny!" as Rolak laughs at him... but as you say, "It was too late"

to turn back. I heave a sigh of relief when they reach the Yanim tree, knowing that they've managed to achieve their end.
But I sigh too soon. It is now things take a turn for the worse. There is the dreadful desolation of the clearing and the dead and injured animals. It is at this point that Sarik's behaviour changes - "Remember, you're a man now!" He stops crying and tries to deal with the situation. They run back to the village but again the fine line reappears; "I wanted to lay my heavy head on my mother's lap, but I knew I couldn't." This of course leads to the terrible ending where they find the village deserted. Sarik has no choice now. He has to be a man, for there is no-one left to parent him.

Appreciation

You write this story very powerfully Amy, and the research you did into tribal ritual and the jungle environment gives your story authenticity. I am particularly impressed with the way the journey into the jungle reflects Sarik's journey into manhood. Of course, it was always meant to do this in a ritual sense but you turn it into a much darker, more real journey to enforced maturity. It is also a powerful comment on environmental threats and how the developed world is affecting tribal existence.'

My response

Involvement

I find this a terrible and tragic story. I would like to believe that the people of the village are hiding and in a minute they will emerge, laughing to greet the two boys. But after their experience in that clearing deep in the forest, I know that I cannot hope for a happy ending and that something dreadful has happened to the tribe.

After the rituals of entering manhood, setting off to the sacred tree was meant to be a challenging experience - intended to include such minor pitfalls as becoming drenched by tropical rain and caked in mud. But for the

change from children to young men to be accompanied by two such dreadful experiences as Sarik and Rolak encounter, is almost too painful to contemplate.

I imagine that the clearing in which only stumps of trees are left, and animals are dying - maybe from shock or want of nourishment - is something to do with the greedy stripping of the Rain Forests by outsiders who have not grown up there. But I cannot imagine what has happened to the whole tribe. Maybe some of them will have survived whatever catastrophe befell and will be able to link up with the two boys.

Appreciation

You capture the sense of this being an authentic tropical forest very well indeed, with details such as the "massive leaves", "the bright, purple fruits" and the "Uakari monkey with its bright red head". The forest is a colourful setting for a story that is full of dark moments!
You also capture all the uncertain feelings which Sarik, the narrator experiences most convincingly, moving from boyish exasperation with Rolak when his friend laughs at him, to his desperate struggle to retain self-control after the scene of death has been encountered: Sarik, 'Stop!' I told myself. 'Remember you're a man now.'

You have given your story a satisfying coherence by linking earlier details with later ones, like the mud on Sarik's body starting to crack and peel as it dries. The most effective and dramatic link of all, is your reference to the hammock at the beginning and again at the end of the narrative: "My mother, lazing in the woven hammock in the shade of the hut" and then: "my mother's empty hammock gently swaying with the breeze". Who knows what scenes of violence it has just witnessed?

You have created a genuinely moving story. Well done!

Of the four collaborating secondary teachers, Kate was the one who already

found it easy to express engagement with her pupils' stories, as our conversation in Chapter 7 makes clear. Although I had not seen her response before I made my own, our feelings about key points in the story are very similar, as we ache for the boys as they arrive at the deserted village - and appreciate the way in which Amy has interwoven the two strands of their metaphorical departure from childhood with the literal destruction of their known and loved environment.

When I asked Amy what she thought about our responses she says:

I liked most of what you both said. I liked the part where Mrs M says about how I describe the jungle - she liked that - and I spent quite a lot of time researching that bit.

I ask her if there is anything that her teacher wrote about the story that had not previously occurred to her and Amy refers to Kate's interpretive comments on the way the story ended:

`Sarik has no choice now. He has to be a man. For there is no-one left to parent him.`

Amy tells me: *I'm glad she put that.*

She also likes the way that we both picked up on the environmental threat:

about the stripping of the Rain Forest by outsiders who don't know about it very well, who haven't grown up there.

Clearly the *meaning* of her story mattered very much to Amy and she is pleased that it has mattered to us too.

I come back to take a closer look at the construction of Amy's story, and how I was enabled to move around in it from a number of different viewpoints, in Chapter 10.

Chapter Six

Thorny thickets

Back in the brambles

Little by little, I was clarifying my perceptions about the nature of the two main categories of response and the relationship between them - or so I thought - until the whole idea of categorising the responses was strongly challenged at a meeting in July '95. The meeting was part of a weekend seminar for educational action researchers at the University of Bath, at which we were each given the opportunity to share with each other, aspects of the enquiries we were currently undertaking.

Prior to this meeting, I had circulated to colleagues my 5th Research Paper based on the responses to The *Knight and the Mushroom* which I have described in the previous chapter, along with the fourth version of the Guidelines outlining the two main categories of response. I reproduce this version again here, as it became the focus of the group's criticisms, along with my attempt to define more clearly the crafting components or narrative techniques mentioned in the responses which I had referred to as 'sub-categories' of Appreciation, parallel to the 'sub-categories' of feelings, thoughts and visual impressions which distinguish Engagement. As a result of the discussion which ensued, I came to realise that maybe categories and sub-categories sounded too definitive, and that two ***kinds*** of personally meaningful response, each of which displayed particular ***features*** would give a better indication of the open-endedness that I genuinely wanted to encourage.

Here, then, are the Guidelines once more:

RESPONDING AS A STORY READER TO THE STORIES YOUR PUPILS WRITE
TWO POSSIBLE RESPONSES

REACTING TO THE STORY

As you read, your attention is focused on the story itself. You are attending closely to what the story is about - to how you feel about the characters and their behaviour, to any thoughts you might have about what is happening in the story, to how you visualise the characters or the setting - and to any questions or speculations that come into your mind, especially if this is your first encounter with the story. In other words, what are you 'making' of the story inside your own head?

APPRECIATING THE WRITER'S EFFORTS

Turn your attention now to the writer, and to how the writer has handled the narrative which comprises the story. Because this is an appreciation and not a criticism or an evaluation, concentrate on what the writer has succeeded in doing (not on what s/he could, in your opinion, do better). Relate your comments on the writer's achievements to specific details in the story; avoid generalisations and assessment type jargon.

AUDIENCE

Remember you are making these comments to the pupil, to let her (or him) know a) your personal reactions to her story; b) your recognition of whatever skills she has shown as a story writer.

As I re-read this particular version of the Guidelines, I can hear how instructional it sounds. I am not telling prospective readers *what* to think, but I appear to be telling them *how* to think. I had written it chiefly with the teachers in mind who had been involved in the January seminar, as a kind of re-clarification of the difference, as I then saw it, between the two kinds of response - along with a clear acknowledgement that the pupil writer was the audience for the first response as much as for the second. I can see, now,

how the tone riled colleagues at the July meeting who had not been involved in the January discussion.

I am still not entirely sure to what extent it was the two main categories of response described in the Guidelines, or 'classifying' my comments under further sub-categories, to which my fellow researchers took such strong exception. Every one of them, however, appeared to feel that I was pre-empting both how they might respond freely to the story themselves, and to the responses that the teacher and the pupils had made.

Here are some of their comments:

What you have done is to extrapolate categories... and I have no choice at all in these. ... I would like to see these responses without someone telling me which categories I must use in order to make sense of them.

You're giving me all these categories - what I would have loved to have seen was an example of two teachers who would have their internalised version and have those beside the story. I would have been fascinated by that. - I could have made up my own mind.

Because there is that analytical filter, I actually lose interest...

I don't want to read these pieces in terms of these categories...I've switched off!

What you've done is what people do when they make up questionnaires... it says an awful lot about the person who's made up the questionnaire and very little about the person who's answered the questions.

I make a further effort to extricate myself from the thorns...

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear! As I re-read these comments now, they still scratch at my sensitivities. Here I was, setting out with the intention of foregrounding how valuable it was for a reader to make a personally

meaningful response to a story, and here was a group of respected colleagues accusing me of depriving them of that very opportunity. I was back in the bramble patch with a vengeance.

Maybe if they had been given time to *use* the Guidelines in making their own responses to the story, they would have discovered that my 'instructions' did, after all, offer an opportunity for the expression of the reader's own thoughts, feelings and impressions, as well as the opportunity to make a positive response to the writer about the way in which the story was written. But they were not, unfortunately, offering their comments from their *experience* of making an aesthetic transaction with the text. All they had, were four of the pupils' responses to *The Knight and the Mushroom* (which they had enjoyed), and my attempted categorisation of what these responses had involved (which they had found extremely off-putting).

Ben even recalls how one of his lecturers in the past nearly succeeded in putting him off literature for good, by taking what he regards as a similar approach to mine:

I remember he was lecturing us in English - and he gave us all these categories. And for the first time in my life and for a long time afterwards, I lost all interest in reading stories and poetry. And when I was working my way through this Paper...I suddenly had a vision of being back... But I think I really would have enjoyed to see either kids or teachers offering various versions [of response] and I myself would pick out the categories.

Whose research is this...?

This brings me to what seems to be a paradox about ownership. My fellow action researchers clearly felt that I was imposing *my* thinking on them, when they would have much preferred to do their own. They didn't want me to pre-

empt what constituted 'a meaningful personal response to a story' they wanted to make up their own minds. But the picture that I was bit by bit developing of what a meaningful personal response might involve, was a picture in *my* mind, as an integral part of *my* journey.

I was worried, though, by Pam's comment :

What you've done is what people do when they make up questionnaires... it says an awful lot about the person who's made up the questionnaire and very little about the person who's answered the questions.

I *wanted* my Guidelines to say a lot about me, as a teacher and as a researcher. My research, like my teaching, is subjective. It is also continually subjected to interpretation, as I ask myself whether my intentions are producing the desired outcomes. I am delighted when they do, and question what went wrong (as on this occasion) when they do not. From her comment, Pam seems to imply that I should have started my enquiry without any of my own ideas in mind - or of subsequently offering my interpretation of the responses which I received.

What I had given to this group, as I saw it, was a sample from one of my preliminary Research Papers of the kind of enquiry that I was making and the direction in which I was moving. I wanted them to accompany me a little of the way on my journey. Instead, they seemed to want to start off on journeys of their own.

Chapter Seven

Sharing Our Understandings

In my conversations with the primary teachers to which I refer in Chapter 3, we had talked about the pleasure that we found in the children's stories as we focused on the meanings which they held for us. It appeared to be a refreshing change for them to pay close attention to the *import* of the stories themselves, unhindered by the more usual need to focus on technicalities. They felt that my Guidelines had helped them to find out more about the work which their pupils had produced in story form. Jill says:

There was a lot more depth to it when you really read it properly and looked at it in that way, instead of just superficially...

or as Fiona later put it:

I'm not just marking it, I'm not just looking at it, I'm interested in it.

Later on in our conversation she adds:

I think that's it isn't it? It's taking the story seriously - as a reader, not as a teacher, as a reader. I'm going to read the story, I'm going to enjoy.

We talked in some detail about the stories themselves, how we had reacted to them individually, and what we had found as we delved below that surface of words strung out across the page. We also considered whether for these young writers, the stories that arrived on the page were really only the tip of the iceberg compared to what they *intended* in their minds.

When I returned to talk to each of the four collaborating secondary teachers, they were more interested to discuss the *nature* of the responses which they had been asked to make than the stories to which they had actually responded. As English teachers, each of them brought along his or her own agenda based on their current classroom practice, which led us to a further

exploration of the distinctions that I was seeking to make and of their educational value, especially in relation to my first kind of response, 'what you are "making" of the story inside your own head'.

As a participant in these different conversations, I was required to re-formulate my thoughts about the nature and function of engaged responses on several occasions, as I sought to explain why I thought they were valuable, just as the teachers were required to re-formulate their thoughts in relation to their present practice. It is my hope that in presenting some of our observations in this way, a sense of the to-and-fro-ness of dialogue, which to me is the essence of a dialectical approach to learning, will be audible in the exchanges which took place. Our discussions form an important part of '*The Whole Story...*'.

Sharing with pupils what we have 'made' of their stories

From the discussion between Pat and Kevin

P. Do you now have a clear idea of what I'm trying for, in saying share your experience of the story with the writer?
K. I know what you mean in theory - it's when I come down to actual practice that I run into difficulties.

*****

P. What I think the differences were between my 'involved' response and yours, was that I refer to more specific details in the stories... I have no difficulty in letting the writer know what my experience of the story has been. For example, I write in my response to Ben:

There are certain moments in the story that I can picture quite clearly: when Francis is standing below the ridge of rock at the back of the cave for instance, preparing to leave in the row boat through the opening that leads to the sea, with the stalactites dripping overhead...

where you make generalised comments like :

I like the way you described the characters... the descriptions of place and people were so clear and authentic.

*****

P. Did the Guidelines help to draw your attention to the story itself?'
K. No, what they did, was made me articulate more clearly my response to the story. Because I take in all these things as I'm reading... but I was then able to feed those back... They're the kind of things that I have in my mind but the Guidelines make me focus on specific aspects that I wouldn't have written down in my response normally. For instance I write to Helen:

I was very involved with this story. It wasn't the usual kind of thing people your age write, because it set up a very difficult situation.

What I would normally have focused on is the appreciation, it's that that I'd have fed back to them more I think.
P. Rather than involvement?
K. Yes.

*****

P. I suppose my bottom line always is - have we given enough attention to what the words are representing... you know, they're not just there in a textual sense. I would say that I'm taking a semantic approach to the text, where the fashionable thing at the moment seems to be to take a textual approach to semantics.
K. You've lost me there Pat!
P. Well, I still feel it is of more importance to pay attention to what the words symbolise for me... I'm not taking a predominantly linguistic or sociological approach. I'm taking the view that it's what the words represent for me that's important.
K. You want to go through the text back into the head?
P. Back into my head, not into the writer's head - I think that's an important distinction. I'm letting the pupil writer know what my virtual text is, how I

experienced the story.
K. I'm clearer about that now, yes, that's helpful! So you have created another text from the text that they have written and you're talking about the text you have created. You're not talking about the text out there on the table. ... ah, it's starting to make more sense now.

As I listen to our discussion at this point, I think we both arrive at a useful clarification - that I'm not asking Kevin to second guess what had been going on in the writer's head but rather to focus on what was happening inside his own head as he read the words on the page - *his* thoughts, *his* feelings, *his* images. Kevin also now grasps this idea of a 'virtual text' being *his* creative experience of the pupil's story to which he can then refer when he feeds back his response.

From the discussion between Andy and Pat

In spite of the fact that the revised version of the Guidelines to which Andy was referring before he made his responses, had a note on audience which ran as follows:

AUDIENCE

Remember you are making these comments to the pupil, to let her (or him) know a) your personal reactions to her story; b) your recognition of whatever skills she has shown as a story writer.

nevertheless, he still seems to be regarding this initial response as one which must put the writer out of mind:

A. The difficulty that I found in writing the response that you were asking for, was to stop myself writing to the author.

I am more aware now than I was then of the distinction that I should have

made more clearly, between attending fully to the story during the *act of reading* and addressing the pupil in the response you make to that act, which then becomes *an act of sharing* with the writer, letting her know the effect that her story had on you, the reader.

Early on in our conversation, when we are talking about the way Andy usually responds to his pupils' stories, he acknowledges that *'after all this time of teaching and marking'*, the response that comes most readily and easily to him, comes from:

that critical side of me, the kind of "This is what I think you should do to get better at writing stories" - it's that, when I was reading their stories that was coming out.

He adds:

I could have done that easily! It's this other thing about responding to the kid's story as a story...

Andy sees his role so strongly, as one of helpful critical analyst, that shifting the emphasis from *text* reader to *story* reader still raises difficulties for him. I continue to press the point:

P. But I still think there is a difference between the experience of the virtual text that you make of a story, however fleeting - letting your pupils know what that was - and writing a slightly more distanced appreciation of how they've done it.

A. I usually try to write two paragraphs, one which does the first thing you said and one which does the second. I usually start with "These are the things I like" and then in the second paragraph, I say "This will help you to improve."

P. But "These are things I like" seem to be "These are things that I like about the way you did it."

Andy is understandably viewing the two different kinds of response suggested in my Guidelines through the lens of his own practice but this prevents him from perceiving the distinction that I am trying to make between letting pupil writers know how you have *experienced* their stories and commenting on their achievements . Even though he describes his two paragraphs as *'one which does the first thing you said and one which does the second'*, his customary initial response is in fact one which recognises achievement - what I liked about the way you wrote your story - while his second set of comments moves away from a personal stance to an evaluative one.

From the discussion between Pat and Chris

P. What I want to ask you first is whether you think giving your attention to the story as a story reader really did draw your attention to things in the story that you might otherwise have missed.

C. From a literary point of view, yes, when you really do read the story that a child has written closely, in order to get to grips with it as a story, rather than starting to evaluate the skills that have been used to write it (which is a teacherly point of focus far too often) then you begin to discover what we really know is going on there - that a child of Matthew's age can present a very powerful story - there is structure there and there is meaning there.

P. It seemed to me that once you began to dig into the themes that you saw emerging - it sounded to me as though you'd got quite taken with that, as though you actually got quite excited and caught up. And to me, that is what I mean by offering a 'story reader's' response.

Chris seems to be much closer to perceiving the first 'Guidelines' response in the same way that the primary teachers perceived it - as a means of

revealing strengths in the child's story through engaging with it, that would not otherwise have been noticed. At the start of our conversation, he had given an honest account of what he calls his usual 'professional' response to marking a set of books:

C. I don't suppose I spend adequate time reading carefully what lies inherently in the meaning of what all pupils write... you feel a compulsion to perform an act of professional neatness, which is to get something back to the pupil which makes them feel their work has been honoured and possibly corrected in some places and features of it drawn to their attention to be praised and then graded. And in that sense, it's quite often the case that one skim reads bits of it.

Chris goes on to acknowledge that:

in that kind of mode of teaching, it's very sad that you miss meanings and you miss the true import of what children write.

Here is an excerpt from his response to *The Knight and the Mushroom* which indicates the kind of thoughtful attention that he was bringing to the story using the Guidelines as a reference point:

Once all these strange events start with the mushrooms, I suppose what I find most interesting about your story is the way that things change. First of all, it is as if the knight has great power, and this is brought out in the way that he grabs the mushrooms and then throws stones at them when one will not budge. But we are reminded of the knight's own weakness and vulnerability, and so the tables are turned and he is in need of help from the mushrooms, which are given a kind of character. You then seem to set up all sorts of interesting themes which I really found quite moving in this unusual story. There was a growth of trust between the two 'characters' - the mushroom and the knight, and there was a hopeful ending as the knight appeared to have been offered help and salvation from such an unlikely source. I believed his promise at the end and

by then had developed more sympathy towards him as a character.

From the discussion between Pat and Kate

In some ways, Kate was unlike the other secondary teachers, in that she already preferred to focus on the *import* rather than the *construction* of stories. For her, reading or writing a story was definitely not a mere exercise in spotting or practising narrative techniques. Kate takes her pupils very seriously as story writers. The Y8 unit which starts with encouraging all the pupils to make their personal responses to a number of short stories by other writers, ends a term later, with the production of their own stories over a period of several weeks. Kate's preference for my first kind of response becomes clear in our conversation, although she has not previously been in the habit of writing down such responses for her pupils.

P. Is there anything there that you think you might not have thought of mentioning if you'd been doing it in your usual...?

K. Whereas beforehand I might have brought up a couple of points to them, when I sat down and wrote it, it's like any form of response that's in more detail, I started coming up with more things. I suppose, for instance, I articulated that he [**Steve in *Crying Wolf***], *is more vulnerable because of the previous trouble, and this therefore increases the tension because no-one's going to believe him.*

P. What I think is different is that your own virtual experience of the story actually gets squeezed out mostly - the teacher as story reader, letting the child know just what happened inside your own head, what feelings you had. When we both talk for instance of Anouska's story, **Nowhere To Run,** *we both home in on the fact that it was so dangerous when she left home for the darkness of the world outside. It's in a way bringing your human experience to the interpretation of that story.*

K. I think to some extent, perhaps the reason why I find it quite a successful thing to do, is because I don't find that side difficult generally. That is the side I prefer, to respond to the child, me as a reader and them as a writer - and I'm responding to the message that they are giving me. I'm responding to the content, because that's what I do when I read.

Let me conclude this section on '**Sharing with pupils what we have 'made' of their stories**' with an excerpt from one of Kate's responses, which shows her interacting with characters and events. She is not telling Anouska what she liked at one remove as Andy might have done, rather she is sharing with the writer *the effect that the story had on her.* Her transaction with the text in Rosenblatt's terms is aesthetic:

```
Straightaway at the beginning of this story, I feel the
girl's situation. She is trying to cope with a difficult
family tragedy where the father is suffering from the
results of an accident. The tension in the house is very
obvious and the pressures that the girl feels. Immediately,
I can empathise with Dad, Mum and daughter. So the
complexity of the problem is clear... Then the fact that
the girl is doing the washing up - I get the feeling she is
expected to help a lot and sacrifice her own needs.
```

Responses which the teachers regarded as educationally valuable in a 'meaningful' sense

Responding to work in progress

All the secondary English teachers had perceptions of their own about what constituted a meaningful response on their part to a pupil's story. Not surprisingly, the context to which they frequently referred was the classroom context while work is in progress and stories are evolving:

A. Well, let me put something else to you then, a contrary view, [to responding in detail once the story is complete] *which is that that story that Tara has finished is like a third draft... And all the way through her writing, those are the*

things I was emphasising to her - she had decided she was going to write a story about going to hospital and she said to me "But nothing happens, it's only me lying on a trolley" and I said but if that's an important part of your story, let's explore what that means, now, together. So in doing that with her, what I think I was doing, I was saying to her that's fair game for a story... this is you in hospital, very ordinary, but let's try and make it extraordinary for you. What I was trying to do in the drafting process was to help her to celebrate those kinds of things she wanted to write a story about. The difficulty comes, I think, when you go through that process and you get to the final draft, that you've already said all the things you wanted to say...

Kate, like Andy, is inclined to believe that she has said everything useful that she has to say about a pupil's story by the time it is finished:

K. .You see, because I do so much verbally, I felt that all I was tending to do was to write down what I'd already said to the child.

However, Kate does tell me that formulating her responses in writing has made her aware that there is always more to say than has already been said:

Whereas beforehand I might have brought up a couple of points to them, when I sat down and wrote it, it's like any form of response that's in more detail, I started coming up with more things.

In fact, where Andy found commenting on aspects of a story's construction more meaningful than this '*responding to a story as a story*' for Kate it was the reverse:

The analysis... I found that quite hard to do. ...So what you made me do was focus more, not on the meaning of the story so much - I always do that - as the analysis.

To come back for a moment, though, to Kate's perception of how oral responses, while work was in progress were most useful:

K. I like to have - I call them tutorials - and I also do group tutorials. So, for instance, Jason... I remember sitting on the floor of the TV room with three other children reading his story through and saying why it wasn't working for me as a reader.

P. But saying why it wasn't working at the revision stage is not the same thing as responding to it once it is completed as a story.

K. Which is the point I am making as well, in that I don't have a clear cut idea of the differences of response. [Here Kate is referring to the differences between a response to work in progress and a response to a completed piece.] *I just do it intuitively. I see it as being an individual tutorial and that I am responding to the story - and I try very hard to focus on it as a story reader.*

P. But in a sense, that's the point , at the end of the draft, when there's a chance to revise it... that is the point at which you might focus in on the things that don't make sense for other readers. One of my suggestions is that once children feel they have completed their stories - it could be more motivating for them to focus at that point on what they have achieved, rather than homing in on what didn't work.

The value of making responses to finished stories

When I say to Andy:

I do think it's important for kids, if they've really tried on something, to have a meaningful response...

he replies "

I agree with you entirely... all those things that you want to say about a kid's story should be there on their work for the kids to look at.

Andy then relates how it is current policy in his department, for all the teachers to write their comments about a pupil's work *on a separate sheet* which is then filed away for assessment purposes:

What I was doing at one time was writing my ideas or whatever on the kid's

work and then rewriting it on this sheet! And that's just potty. So I've started now just writing it on the sheet.

Clearly Andy does recognise that a written response to a pupil's completed story can be of value to the writer and he is unhappy that the responses he makes have been shifted from the writer's story to the assessment file as there is little point in duplication.

On the other hand, I can understand from his description, why hard pressed teachers feel that a detailed commentary such as my Guidelines suggest, is hardly necessary when much of what the teacher has made of the story as it was evolving, has already been discussed with the pupil. Once more, I freely acknowledge that there are pressures of time for both primary and secondary teachers which make detailed responses to all pupils' work unrealistic. And yet, and yet... if children never receive an aesthetic response to their own completed stories, in which a reader offers back what she has 'made' of their offerings, surely the covert message is increasingly bound to be that these are little more than exercises in narrative construction.

The development of pupils as story *readers*

At this stage in my research, I was about to shift the focus of my enquiry from teachers as story readers to pupils as story readers. Once the new school year started in the Autumn term, 1995, I wanted to find out whether the Guidelines which I had been developing could help pupils also, to respond in a personally meaningful way to literary texts.

I was interested, therefore, to find out how these secondary teachers usually

invited their pupils to respond to stories. There were some interesting variations of approach.

From the discussion between Pat and Kevin

P. ... if you're inviting pupils to share how they respond to another story - I mean don't you invite them to share what they have made of the text in order to explore the variations of what they select and how the interpret the text?

K. I think two years ago I probably would have done, but with the National Curriculum I feel constrained by the amount of time we've got...

P. What are you seeking to do then, in developing your pupils as story readers? What kind of strategies?

K. I've moved much more (and again it's very specifically because of the tests they're having to do) to focusing on strategies for extracting meaning from a text and giving them strategies like looking at the structure, identifying voice... looking at linkages in the text... chaining of ideas and sort of trawling for things that come up... stretches of dialogue, stretches of description... it's alerting them to the range of things they could look for.

P. Looking for in relation to what?

K. To being able to answer the question 'How is the writer trying to present this character... build up suspense... what kind of atmosphere is the writer trying to establish?'

P. Techniques?

K. Literary analysis.

P. You're saying it becomes simply an object for analysis?

K. I see my role as giving them the vocabulary for discussing the meaning of the

text and the structure of the text and how the writer communicates what he or she wants to say because that's what's being asked for and I'm not doing the kids a service if I don't teach them that.

From the discussion between Andy and Pat

I relate to Andy what Kevin has told me about his changed approach and he responds:

A. I think that's one of the big shames of the current pressures that teachers are under now... My current Y11 class, we're just revising Of Mice and Men and I tried to get a couple of them to bring in their original notebooks because the first things that I asked them to do were things like 'Well, what did you think of it? What sort of response are you making? How do you think Lenny gets on with George? Why do you think George is treating him like that?'

P. So interpreting the significance...

A. Much more relating to the characters, rather than thinking about how Steinbeck's done that... An emotional response I've always found more useful than starting with the idea of 'Right, we're going to talk about John Steinbeck today'.

Here Andy repeats a point of view that he expressed in the January seminar:

I get them to write their own responses to begin with, but then move from that to the question 'Well, how does the writer get you to feel like that about the story?'

The point is that 'their own responses *to begin with* ' for Andy, means that these experiential responses get left behind. He is still operating with the Purves [1968] concept of Perception as being :

> **'the ways in which a person looks at the work as an object distinct from himself...' [p.6]**

I was increasingly becoming convinced that the reader's experience of a story text is more than a trampolining point that will eject her from the story as she turns to a consideration of its construction. To use an even more far-flung metaphor, I would agree with Andy that making an engaged or internalised response to a story *first*, does indeed help a reader to be more specifically appreciative; where I would disagree, is making the assumption that this response can then be detached like the wire that helps a glider to become airborne.

Without close reference to those mental processes by means of which the reader has made her transaction with the text, her thoughts, her feelings, her impressions, what Rosenblatt, Iser and Bruner all refer to as the 'literary work' ceases, effectively, to exist, as the text becomes nothing more than words arranged on the page. Added to which, if the reader's experience of the text in the act of reading becomes divorced from her appreciation of its construction, the dynamic which is involved in the way that the reader moves through the text, as Iser [1978] describes it, will be quite lost.

From the discussion between Chris and Pat

Like Kevin, Chris observes that:

The repertoire [of responses] that I use is driven by different needs and different demands.

He explains that:

I get pupils to respond with their views to stories and to text in a variety of ways for different purposes.

When I ask for specific examples it becomes apparent that many of these are oriented to *the writer's handling of the narrative* as set out in the NCC [1995] requirements for Reading in Key Stages 3 and 4: Pupils should be taught to:

extract meaning... analyse... analyse... reflect on the writer's presentation of ideas....

C. Well, I might be getting pupils to look at the ways in which the writer constructs dramatic tension. I might be getting pupils to look at the ways in which the writer uses characterisation or description to add an insight or an understanding of something - I might be getting them to look at ways in which a sequence of events in a narrative might be contributing to the meaning.

Let me make it clear, as I refer to these comments from Kevin, Andy and Chris, that of course I am not opposed to drawing pupils' attention to the writer's crafting of a story - what Iser [1978] refers to as the 'artistic pole'. In the next chapter, I describe how my map for making an Appreciative response is closely related to the crafting components that the writer has used. The difference is that in my Guidelines for Appreciation, the reader's experience of the story is also taken into account - *in relation to* the writer's handling of the narrative.

What I take exception to, and what this enquiry sets out to redress in some small way, is the reduction of the reader's *own* thoughts, feelings and impressions to a second class status, compared to a capacity to analyse a story text for techniques of narrative construction. To me, this is like placing the close inspection of a car's engine and its inter-related parts on a higher level than the actual journey. Both have a place - and for a mechanic as for some literary critics, the close inspection may take pride of place. But for most car users, as for most readers, it is the excitement, or the pleasure - or the terror of the experience which counts.

Here is Chris, reflecting on his own experience as a story reader and then relating it to his approaches in the classroom:

C. I'm re-reading most of Hardy's works at the moment, and although I'm capable if somebody asks me... of looking into a Hardy novel and saying 'Oh yes, I can tell you about the style, I can tell you something about what he's doing with his writing and so on. When I'm reading his work I'm not conscious too much of those kinds of things then. So I suppose what I'm saying is that perhaps too often in the classroom with pupils, we do strike first at the skills of writing and reading - we start looking at style and expression and all that kind of thing...
I'm quite interested in this idea of going straight to respond to the story... and it seems to me that then, if you can enter into a dialogue about that... then possibly you may stand a better chance any way of letting other things fall into place.

From the discussion between Kate and Pat

When I asked Kate:

Could you use my two categories of response for the pupils' own written responses to published stories?

she is more cautious about the off-putting effects of 'Appreciating the Writer's Achievements' than she is about 'Reacting to the Story':

K. I think my only worry with it would be turning children off, because I actually think it's quite difficult.

In keeping with her own preference for responding to the meaning that a story has for her, Kate encourages what she calls an openness of response, based on suggestions from Aidan Chambers [1985].

K. He says that one of the problems with children is that adults ask them too hard questions when they want them to respond to a story - which is why he gave the list of 'What interests you?' 'What confuses you?' 'What don't you like?' Terribly general questions and it allows them to respond openly...

Kate then goes on to consider how the kinds of response suggested in my

Guidelines might be related to her current approach:

K. I think you could then move on to saying 'We could actually look at this as being two responses ' and doing exactly what you've done with me. One could be a response completely related to the story and one could be where we're saying what particularly works in the story for us.

Chapter Eight

Making my own maps

I was looking forward to finding out whether my Guidelines could be used to encourage pupils to make 'a meaningful personal response' to the stories of other authors - expressing their own thoughts and feelings and impressions, as well as commenting on the writer's achievements as a narrator. But first, I had to take a closer look at all the responses I had so far received in order to develop a more detailed picture of what they involved and of the distinctions that could be drawn between 'engagement' and 'appreciation'.

When she was having a struggle about something, my mother would often say ' One step forward and two steps back!' That is what it feels like as I reflect upon this next 'stage' of my enquiry. At the time, the logical step forward seemed to be to make an analysis of all the responses that comprised my data, 60 written by teachers and 60 written by me, in order to cover the whole range of features that were represented in the entire collection.

I took the view that I was now in a position to draw up my own maps from the evidence that I had compiled, *through exemplification*. So I set about trawling through the responses in order to discover what characterised each kind of response in more detail..

I think now, that in seeking to make this overall analysis of the responses I was in danger of falling into the very trap that I had been seeking to avoid with respect to the stories themselves. In selecting a quotation here and a quotation there, I was fragmenting the *wholeness* of each response, which is ultimately what rendered it personally meaningful to the reader. I was also

dissipating the focus on each unique story that our complete responses displayed.

However, that said, I do not think that my attempts to make my own 'Ordnance Survey' for each kind of response were entirely in vain. There was that 'one step forward', in the sense that I was able to develop a much fuller picture of distinguishable features which characterised each kind of response. Thus, I was able to construct two frameworks, based on the distinctions which I perceived - a horizontal cross section, which in its turn could offer guidance about the kind of comments that individual responses to individual stories might entail.

I have come to regard these Frameworks as potentially useful teaching aids for helping teachers to explain to pupils what they need to keep in mind if they are to develop their ability to respond aesthetically to story texts. I also would suggest that they could be used as the basis for formulating criteria for the interpretive assessment of story writing and story reading. They are included in outline, as Appendices to this chapter.

It would be tedious if I were to quote all the examples that I extrapolated from the stories for the list of features in each Framework. I hope a selection will give sufficient indication of how rich the variety of comments can be, given the personal involvement of the reader, both to the content of a story and to the writer's achievements in its construction. The number in brackets at the end of each excerpt refers to the story to which the response relates, according to its alphabetical listing in the Appendix at the end of the thesis, where each of the stories appears in full.

A) ENGAGEMENT

FEELINGS

Reflecting

My own feelings were mixed about the two of them deciding to remain in their animal shapes. They were such happy, competent and active human beings. I can't help feeling that their lives as animals will inevitably be restricted. [2]

*****

I can imagine how important it is to belong to a gang but I don't know whether I could actually cut my skin as part of the trial to get in. [17]

*****

I wonder what it feels like to be banned from eating! I very rarely lose my appetite. I've never had any operation except for an extraction. That was nerve-wracking enough![29]

Personal experience, sympathy and understanding

Despite sympathising with you and your desire to play in the street, I also feel sympathy for Mr Jones. I think it's the limp that gives me this feeling. That and his desperation - he so wanted to sell his house.[5]

*****

I do sympathise with the way the narrator is torn between loyalty to her friend and the thrill of being chosen by Mark to be his new girl friend. I can understand the pleasure she feels... and the guilt feelings to which the story refers. [9]

Empathising

Straightaway at the beginning of this story, I feel the girl's situation. She is trying to cope with a difficult family tragedy where the father is suffering from the

results of an accident. [10]

*****

I felt that I was sharing the pre-match excitement with them and the anticipation in the build up to the match.[20]

*****

When the water started to carry her towards the fish, I felt as helpless as she did. [23]

Generally, as a reader

I was kept on tenterhooks all the way through... [28]

*****

I find this quite a sad story. The position that the knight finds himself in, banished from his castle, disturbs me. [19]

*****

THOUGHTS

Reflecting

The knight seems lonely and unhappy.He seems solemn and lost. ... The mushroom seems quite clever and strict.[19]

*****

I can't help thinking that McLeish was incredibly lucky to score three fantastic goals in the very first game that he plays for his team. It all sounds a bit too good to be true to me! [20]

*****

What strikes me about this story, is the way that life can suddenly change without any apparent warning. [30]

*****

Interpreting

At first, when you became an elf and hid behind a pebble, I thought the story was going to be disastrous and you were going to have lots of difficulties because of your size - then I realised that this wouldn't happen, when you immediately responded to the little elf crying. [7]

*****

Rachel takes things from home so it's still important to her.Then she leaves the tension of the house and feels she escapes - and yet,as a reader, I'm aware she's opening herself to dangers.[10]

Making value judgements

The girls seem very disorganised in the story - take the one who jumps into the pool in her vest and knickers for instance. It was certainly very foolish of Shanon to be so disobedient. [23]

*****

I think she was wise to opt for a friendship that was tried and tested rather than a love affair which might not have lasted very long anyway! I think she had a strong streak of loyalty to her friend which I admire. [9]

Speculating

Maybe he isn't as heroic as knights are normally because he doesn't want to pull a muscle in his back. [19]

*****

...it opens up all sorts of possibilities for my own imagination to play on - about whatever it was that disfigured the car and removed the petrol cap. [21]

Making connections with other stories

When you were falling it reminded me of *Alice in Wonderland*. ...
The end bit, finding a toy elf in your pocket reminded me of a story I know called *Dolphin Boy* . [7]

*****

It reminds me of *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Really stood it on its head. [14]

*****

I was very taken with this story Ben, it reminded me strongly of *Treasure Island* - have you read it? [16]

IMPRESSIONS

Seeing

In my mind's eye I saw the mushroom as a weird cartoon character and the knight as one dressed up in armour with his visor down, maybe stuck. [19]

*****

I have these close-up images of nettles and brambles, which the boy overcomes as he climbs the tree and has this almost paradisal vision of the forest spread out below him. I see this not as emerald green, but in much paler, softer colours - almost like an oval image inside the boy's head - what he thinks he is seeing...[22]

Hearing

The sinister laugh of the stranger truly sounded like someone wanting to take over the world. [1]

Touching, tasting, smelling, moving

I had a great picture of you foiling the villain by kicking him in the shins! [26]

*****

I think I would have wanted to try one of those mixtures - I think the recipes sound delicious. [13]

What I have in mind as I read, is the disinfectant smell of hospitals, people moving purposefully around and sick people in wards. [29]

*****

I think the most brilliant moment in your story comes when you focus our attention on the players' feet: 'The whistle blew, and the feet moved, they went up and down, up and down,' Now that one sentence brings a most vivid picture to my mind.[20]

Mood

At first, once she is out of the house... there is that wonderful feeling of release. Then gradually the mood changes to uncertainty, fear and finally panic. [10]

*****

I find this story very dreamlike...' [26]

QUESTIONS

For information

What did Tom's mother say, to make him angry enough to run away? [28]

For an explanation

Most of all, I would like to know why they exchange their animals. [2]

For interpretation

I would like to know why Laurie said nothing happened, to his Mum. Did he feel she would not believe him or did he feel because he was frightened in the warehouse... that he did not stay long enough? [27]

B) APPRECIATION

CHARACTERISATION

Focus on feelings

As the central character in your own account, the focus on your changing feelings is very effective as they relate to the decisions you make,to your actions and to the repercussions from those actions. [17]

Focus on relationships

On the first page you have told me who the characters are and you have told me what the conflict is - Tom and his mother are always arguing. [28]

Focus on contrast of characters

I like the difference between their two characters - although it is Tom who discovers the castle, Robert is the one with the initiative to work out a way of getting past the drawbridge. [25]

Focus on actions and behaviour

As the central character in your own account, the focus throughout on your changing feelings is very effective, as they relate to the decisions you make, to your actions and to the repercussions from those actions.[17]

*****

I enjoyed the way you made the human character tell the ghosts off - and then end up being their manager and friend. [18]

Focus on realism

It was very true to life, the way your characters spoke and behaved. [[5]

DIALOGUE

To move the action on

I like the way you use dialogue all through your story, to express the feelings of the characters and to move the action forward. For instance, it is because Bobby shouts 'Oh go away!' at Mr Jones, that the old man starts hitting him with his stick - which is what causes Bobby to be one of the lads who remove his For Sale notice sign. [5]

To make the characters convincing

I thought your use of dialogue as the players all crowd into the van was very realistic - and also the shouts during the match itself. [20]

To reveal character

You make excellent use of dialogue in the conversation between Rowanne and Dan Lawrence - both to tell us what the situation is and to give us an insight into their characters. [13]

To communicate feelings

The various conversations in the story help...to reveal the feelings of the characters - Mark's hesitancy for instance - and Laura's anger when she feels betrayed. [9]

To evoke atmosphere

The dialogue on the winning night heightened the excitement of the event. [30]

STRUCTURE AND PACE

Overall shape

I am impressed with the number of twists and turns which you incorporate into the plot before a conclusion is reached with the three deaths. [16]

Coherence

You do well to keep track of events - like remembering that Steve had to return home yet again, after lunch, to collect his cleaning things a second time. [1]

Reference to narrator or to narrative time

Mark's unease is quickly registered through the eyes - and through the conversation of the narrator. The way in which we are briefly led into thinking that the 'someone else' is not the narrator after all, helps to create a few moments of suspense before the telephone call reveals all! [9]

*****

Fast Pace

Your account of the game has that kind of speed and pace that commentators use... [15]

Slow Pace

I like the way that you lead up to the operation gradually. I think it's appropriate that two thirds of your story is taken up with describing what happened before your tonsils were removed. [29]

BEGINNINGS

You really set the scene well, particularly with the lightning striking - a really spooky start! [18]

*****

I really liked the beginning of your story, when you used the guide's introduction to the time machine, breaking into Laurie's bored state of mind, to get the reader's attention.[27]

ENDINGS

Real mastery is shown by the ending. At the beginning, he is scrubbing off the graffiti... and then this links beautifully with the ironic message that is left on the wall at the end. [1]

*****

Your last paragraph 'Suddenly, there was a knock at the door...' was well chosen for changing the mood of the story and ending with suspense. [30]

TONE AND ATMOSPHERE

Focus on events

I like the way you start to build up the atmosphere of suspense by describing the strange goings on at your friend's house. [21]

Focus on feelings

There is the tension of you waiting for the big moment. I have felt that apprehension and think that you have caught it well. [30]

Focus on narrative voice

The tongue-in-cheek tone of voice which you assume as the observer of all these antics, is extremely well sustained through all the remarks in parenthesis which occur throughout the account. [12]

*****

Focus on setting

I very much like the way you contrast the familiarity of home... with the sinister darkness and utter emptiness of the nocturnal landscape. [10].

DESCRIPTION

Evocation of characters, events, settings

As you developed your characters, I could sense the relationship and conflict in the family.[30]

*****

The opening makes lots of references to the Big Match and this helps build up the tension and anticipation. It also reinforces how important this match is. [15]

*****

You capture the sense of this being an authentic tropical forest very well indeed - with details such as the 'massive leaves', 'bright purple fruits' and the 'Uakari monkey with its bright red head' . [4]

Economy of detail

I liked the way that you did not clutter it with a lot of extra detail. There was just enough description to give a feeling of the surroundings, and this helped to hint at the night forest rather than state it too strongly. [19]

SIGNIFICANT DETAILS

Coherence

I think your reference to the condensation in the car is a brilliant touch, as it makes sense of all those fingerprints showing up at the end.[21]

*****

I am most impressed by the care that you have taken to make all the details in your story consistent. The fact that the Hodgsons are too poor to possess a TV for instance, and have to watch the lottery draw at the local pub - or the fact that droopy Dad can only say 'I'm happy. Hooray.' in a dead pan voice... [30]

Realism

The detail about the nurse hitting your hand to try and find the vein, also creates a strong sense of a real event. [29]

Insight into character

I love Everton as a character. He is larger than life: 'dipped his large hand into the bowl of strawberries'. Everything he does seems to reflect confidence and a rich life style.[14]

*****

... the images of the addict in the alley, Everton pouring Chablis and 'dipping his large hand into the bowl of strawberries', the body with 'wires sprouting in all directions' are all sharply focused, like camera close-ups. [14]

THEMES

It was a neat idea to focus the story on the ups and downs... of this group of young males. [12]

*****

You then set up all sorts of interesting themes which I really found quite moving in this unusual story. There was

a growth of trust between the two 'characters'... and there was a hopeful ending as the knight appeared to have been offered salvation and help from an unlikely source... There was something quite touching about the agreement between the two at the end... [19]

GENRE

A really satisfying story with all the key elements of well known stories - magic, resolution, luck. [7]

*****

I really like the way that things just happen and an explanation isn't forced down your throat. I like that because it suits this kind of fantasy... [19]

On further reflection...

I am particularly struck, as I read through these 'appreciative' responses, by the extent to which they do indeed recognise the positive achievements of the pupil writers through their focus on the *particularities* of the stories. Although, in a sense, the readers have stepped out of the story in order to consider the writer's handling of the narrative, *they do not lose sight of their experience of it.* The reader is still present as an 'I', and in addressing the writer directly as 'you' both reader and writer are drawn into a relationship with each other.

I suggested in Chapter 4 that the pupils who responded to *The Knight and the Mushroom* were more able to write appreciations of the way Matthew had written the story because they were able to reflect back on what it had meant to them. I have the same impression strongly here - that the teachers and myself were more able to be specifically and positively appreciative of each pupil's story because we had focused first of all on engagement. Paying thoughtful attention to what we 'make' of these stories, offers a

different perspective as a starting point for an appreciation, by comparison with an approach which leaves the reader's imagination out of the equation.

I shall move in my next chapter to a consideration of other research into readers' responses to fiction, in order to gain a further perspective from the high ground of literary theory from which the pupils' stories and our responses to them can be viewed . However, before I put my own maps to one side, let me offer a brief paragraph from my 9th Research Paper, which explains why the labels 'language' and 'style' do not appear in my framework for appreciating a writer's achievements:

A note on 'language and style'

It may seem surprising that my framework for handling narrative does not refer specifically to either of these textual features...

As far as 'language' is concerned, this omission was because wherever 'words' were cited, the reader's comments *gave some explanation of how they had affected her*, which placed them in a different grouping. For instance `'I liked the way you used words like "suddenly" to add to the excitement of your story'` refers to the mood created by the word or `'Your use of "a few metres away" carried the reader on the journey with you'` is letting the writer know how this phrase offered a realistic detail.

As for 'style', the word is a catch-all which can refer to many different components of expression that combine to create the total effect in a piece of writing. In this respect, my entire framework for crafting components could be said to be stylistic. I have always been of the opinion that such comments as 'excellent use of vocabulary' or 'You must try to improve your style' were too

vague to be helpful. The responses collected for this enquiry would appear to indicate that it is only when such comments are related to specific details of the text, *which indicate the effect they had on the reader*, that they become meaningful.

Since making these comments in that earlier Research Paper, I have subsequently had occasion to take a closer look at the way that 'style' appears to be interpreted in the KS 2 SATs Performance Criteria for writing [1997] as chiefly a matter of: 'A range of sentence structures and varied vocabulary' - as this Descriptor for Level 4 at KS2 in the 1997 English Test indicates quite clearly:

> Meaning is extended through the use of grammatically complex sentences, showing for example, different types of sentence connectives (*if, when, rather than, although, however*), and the expansion of phrases before or after the noun. Well-chosen phrases (such as adverbial phrases) or attempts to use adventurous vocabulary contribute to the effectiveness of the writing. Pronouns and tenses are generally consistent throughout.[p.21]

This, too, I totally reject. According to this definition of style, Ted Hughes would never have reached Level 4 when he wrote the opening of *The Iron Man*!

Appendix One
A FRAMEWORK FOR FEATURES WHICH CHARACTERISE ENGAGEMENT

FEELINGS

Reflecting
Personal experience, sympathy and understanding
Empathising
Generally, as a reader

THOUGHTS

Reflecting
Interpreting
Making value judgements
Speculating
Making connections with other stories

IMPRESSIONS

Seeing
Hearing
Touching, Tasting, Smelling, Moving
Mood

QUESTIONS

For information
For an explanation
For interpretation

This is an outline which indicates how readers can be encouraged to experience a story for themselves

Appendix Two

A FRAMEWORK FOR FEATURES WHICH CHARACTERISE APPRECIATION

CHARACTERISATION
Focus on feelings
Focus on relationships
Focus on contrast of characters
Focus on actions and behaviour
Focus on realism

DIALOGUE
To move the action on
To make the characters convincing
To reveal character
To communicate feelings
To evoke atmosphere

STRUCTURE AND PACE
Overall shape
Coherence
References to a narrator or to narrative time
Fast pace
Slow pace

BEGINNINGS

ENDINGS

TONE/ATMOSPHERE
Focus on events
Focus on feelings
Focus on narrative voice
Focus on setting

DESCRIPTION
Evocation of character, events, settings
Economy of detail

SIGNIFICANT DETAILS
Coherence
Realism
Insight into character

THEMES

GENRE

This is an outline which indicates how readers can be encouraged to think about the construction of a story in relation to their own personal responses.

Chapter Nine

Exploring the field of reader-response theory

I have explained in Chapter 1 how I started my search to find out more about 'meaningful personal responses' by taking my directions from the work of Louise Rosenblatt [1938, 1978, 1985] and Alan Purves [1968]. I have also described in Chapter 8 how I made my own reference maps based upon and illustrated by data provided from my own research.

It is now time to take a closer look at the work of other theorists in the field, in order to provide a more detailed background for my enquiry. In Chapter 10 I shall consider how aspects of these theories may have relevance to my own investigation into what characterises meaningful personal responses to pupils' stories in an educational context.

In two senses, this chapter is not strictly chronological. I did not make one lengthy excursion into theory at a set point in the investigation but rather engaged with the work of various reader-response theorists as the opportunities arose. However, I shall not take these contributions to the field of reader-response research in the order in which they were encountered, as I prefer to group them according to the different perspectives which, between them, these writers have taken.

In the collection of Papers which she edited, Tompkins [1980] comments:

> 'Reader-response criticism is not a conceptually unified position, but a term that has come to be associated with the work of critics who use the words *reader, the reading process,* and *response*, to mark out an area for investigation.'
>
> [p.ix]

I would add, that not all reader-response theorists are primarily critics - some are university teachers of Literature, others come from the disciplines of philosophy and psychology. But all are interested in what a story text has to offer to the reader - and what readers 'make' of a story text. I took that as my guide for selecting theorists, choosing at this point, not to stray further afield into ways of reading texts which were either predominantly linguistic or socio-cultural. It is the focus on *reader-response* which is central to my research.

Let me start my survey by giving a brief account of two NCTE Research Reports which preceded the 1968 Research Report by Alan Purves, to which I have already referred in some detail in Chapter 1. Prior to Purves, two university teachers of Literature each made studies on a smaller scale, based respectively on the responses of 52 teenagers to four short stories and the responses of 54 undergraduates to three well known American novels: *The Catcher in the Rye, A Farewell to Arms*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Squire [1964] and Wilson [1966] were mainly interested in mapping responses across the groups of students who were the subjects for their research, although this also involved the mapping of individual responses in relation to these overall patterns. Squire's investigation focused on changes of response *during* the reading of a story; Wilson's on the changes which occurred *after* each text had been discussed in two seventy minute sessions. Ultimately, their interest lay in finding ways of becoming more specific about the *kind of responses* students made to literary texts, in order to form a clearer picture of what constituted development, that would be helpful to both teachers and students.

Their methodology was predominantly quantitative. Both Reports contain graphs and tables which present a content analysis of the responses that were collected as data, alongside a more descriptive and interpretive account of what they make of these statistical patterns. As my investigation is qualitative rather than quantitative, I shall focus on those aspects of each of their Reports which comment on the nature of the individual responses rather than the graphs and tables which relate to group performance.

James Squire:

The Responses of Adolescents While Reading Four Short Stories [1964]

Squire was interested from a teacher's point of view in

> 'What happens to readers when they read and respond to a short story? What do they think, feel or react to at any moment?'[p.1]

He explains that:

> 'unless teachers develop a greater understanding about *how literary interpretations develop*, they will continue to be handicapped in trying to help students refine their skills of literary analysis.' [my italics][p.1]

To find out what happens to readers when they read, he interviewed 52 teenagers between the ages of 14.10 and 16.2 for 'several hours' each, recording their oral responses to four short stories - stopping each story at six pre-selected intervals so that variations in an individual's response could be tracked from start to finish.

From his analysis of all this oral data, Squire identified seven categories of response:

'1) Literary Judgements

2) Interpretational Responses

3) Narrational Reactions

4) Associational Responses

5) Self-involvement

6) Prescriptive Judgements

7) Miscellaneous

Sources of difficulty for adolescent readers

Squire observes that:

> 'a study of the transcripts reveals six sources of difficulty to be particularly widespread among these 52 adolescent readers:
> the reader fails to grasp the most obvious meanings...
> the reader relies on stock responses...
> the reader is 'happiness bound'...
> the reader approaches literature with certain critical predispositions...
> the reader is sidetracked by irrelevant associations...
> the reader is determined to achieve certainty.' [p. 37]

He concludes:

> '... all six of the barriers to sound interpretation are sufficiently prevalent in the transcripts to justify the assumption that such difficulties must be rather widespread if these 52 subjects are in any way representative of their age group. Teachers who are interested in encouraging the appreciation of literature might well consider which instructional procedures tend to

reduce or eliminate the difficulties in interpretation which were discovered here.' [p.49]

Implications for teaching

a) Help with interpretation

In view of these common sources of misunderstanding, Squire claims that:

'Adolescent readers clearly need assistance in learning to interpret literature. [p.54]

In this respect, he is more directive than Wilson - maybe because he has school children in mind rather than undergraduates. He does, however, allow for the value of coming face to face with the variations in interpretation that a comparison of student responses can reveal:

'Searching questions from the teacher and confrontation of different students' interpretations *may lead readers to a re-enactment of their own reading processes* and ultimately encourage them to assume a more critical view toward their own responses.' [my italics][p.55]

b) Assessing the quality of an individual's response

'Teachers also need to develop better techniques for assessing the *quality* of an individual's response to literature. Interpretational ability and reading ability, as measured by the standardised reading test used in this study, seem not to be significantly related. *Responses to literature involve a greater range and complexity than are measured in a test confined to measuring literal comprehension.*' [my italics][p.56]

I find this recommendation particularly interesting in view of my own analysis of the approach to assessing reading comprehension in the 1997 Reading Test for KS2 in Chapter 16.

James Wilson:

Responses of College Freshmen to Three Novels [1966]

Where Squire considers the changes in response which happen during the reading of a story, Wilson considers changes in written protocols which students produced before and after class discussion. He has two research questions - What do student responses involve? and How does class study change initial responses? He uses Squire's 7 categories to classify the responses which he received from his 54 undergraduates and makes a content analysis of the changes which occurred after two class sessions.

Class discussions

Wilson is insistent that the class discussions (one teacher led, one led by a student panel) were deliberately 'open':

> 'While there was no set structure to the discussions, typically they 1) began with responses usually accepted without comment, from a wide range of students, 2) were followed by intensive examination of those aspects of the novel which produced sharp disagreement, and 3) concluded with integrating views of the novel.' [p.8]

This last 'integrating' procedure seems somewhat misleading, as in the very next paragraph, Wilson adds:

> 'No attempt was made to arrive at interpretational consensus; the instructor encouraged as full a play of response as possible.'
> And again:
> 'The object of the discussions was to stimulate the student to create his own insights and discriminations, to release him from passive absorption in the instructor's flow of ideas.' [p.8]

Overall Patterns of Response

As with Squire's study, the four responses that predominated - in this case in the initial protocols, were *Literary Judgement, Interpretational Responses, Narrational Reactions* and *Self Involvement.* In this investigation, after discussion the percentage measurements of all of them declined sharply, with the exception of *Interpretational* which correspondingly increased. Wilson comments that :

> 'This trend was probably reinforced by the instructor's refusal to make literary judgements, to supply 'correct' interpretations, or to resolve disputes in interpretation.'
> [p.13]

Individual Analyses

Wilson then makes a more detailed study of nine students, taking into account only the three predominating categories *Interpretational Responses Literary Judgement, Self Involvement.*. These enabled him to be a little more specific, though not much, about the *nature* of the changes that were involved. For instance:

> ' The increased efforts at interpretation following study [were] usually *more objective and more analytic* than responses in literary judgement [prior to study].'
> [my italics][p.35]

Literary Interpretation and Self Involvement

Wilson's concept of 'Interpretation' as 'more objective and analytic' seems closer to Purves's response category of *Perception* than his category of *Interpretation.* That said, I find one of the most interesting parts of Wilson's study, is his interest in the part that self involvement could play in the development of the student's capacity to interpret if, in moving to analysis,

the reader did not lose sight of this initial engagement with the text.

He comments that:

> 'We know that study reduced scores in self involvement and increased scores in interpretation. But what happened to the *quality* of the interpretations? Were there any relations between the adequacy of interpretational responses and the intensity of self involvement? ' [p.37]

He speculates that:

> 'an initial self involvement is necessary for effective interpretational processes'
> and that:
> 'Perhaps *self involvement processes tend to be unexamined and unanalysed*, whereas interpretative processes tend to be more sharply formulated, analytic, and more objectively related to the characteristics of the work.' [my italics][p.38]

I am reminded of how I was aware that 'stepping out' of a story could switch the emphasis of a reader's response from aesthetic to efferent, and of how I came to realise after reading the pupils' responses to *The Knight and the Mushroom*, that a) formulating their engaged responses in writing and then b) keeping them in mind, could help the pupils to retain an aesthetic quality when they came to write an appreciation for Matthew concerning his handling of the narrative.

Wilson's interest in the part that personal involvement plays in a reader's response also calls to mind Squire's remark at the conclusion of his own investigation:

> 'As Louise Rosenblatt [1956] has written, 'Whatever the specific framework may be [for analysing a literary work],

> one requirement seems to be fundamental: the problems should be phrased in terms of the transaction between the reader and the book. *The analysis of the "how" of the book will be a logical outcome of the "what" of the actual quality of the experience with it.* Such understanding of technique and background will not become an end in itself, but will serve to illuminate or organise the pupil's sense of the work *as a total experience.'* [my italics] [p.57]

Wilson emphasises the necessity for an aesthetic involvement as his first teaching recommendation:

> 'College students are usually more personally involved in a novel before they try to analyse it: their involvement seems to fade when they get down to serious analysis. Yet this first involvement-identification with, or rejection of, the characters and their actions - *seems to catalyse and enrich the analysis which follows.* The college instructor should recognise that self involvement of the student in the story is preliminary and stimulating to active exploration; attempts to grasp meaning seem to grow out of this first phase of feeling into.' [my italics] [p.40]

His perception of self-involvement as a *preliminary* rather than a *continuous* process, reminds me of the way that Andy, Kevin and Chris in my own research similarly perceive story reading development as a shift from personally meaningful responses to forms of response which are focused predominantly on how the *writer* handles the narrative. As Rosenblatt [1978] puts it so vividly:

> '...on a darkened stage I see the figures of the author and the reader, with the book - the text of the poem or play or novel - between them. The spotlight focuses on one of them so brightly that the others fade into practical invisibility. ...usually either the book or the writer has received major illumination. The reader has tended to remain in shadow...'

[p.1]

However, in his final paragraph Wilson comments that:

> 'The *exceptional* student may maintain empathy during "sustained contact" with the work, *joining personal involvement and analysis*.' [my italics][p.41]

My research into the relationship between engagement and appreciation, would suggest that it is not only the brightest students who can combine involvement with analysis, if, that is, they are encouraged not to put the effect that a story had on them personally to one side, but rather to keep it centrally in mind when they come to consider the construction.

Susanne K.Langer:

Feeling and Form [1953]

Strictly speaking, Langer is not a reader-response theorist. Her main interest lies in exploring the nature of literature as an art form among other art forms. In focusing on the modes of expression which artists use to make their creations, in the case of the verbal arts, she insists that the artefacts created are essentially 'non-discursive symbolic forms' [p.211]. In fact she maintains that poetry (a term she uses to refer equally to poems, stories, plays) 'is not genuine discourse at all' it merely presents the appearance of discourse because the artist has chosen language rather than say paint or music or movement.

This is not a view that would find favour with those who designed the current SATs Tests for story writing at KS2 where style can be defined as:

'...the use of grammatically complex sentences, showing, for example, different types of sentence connectives... and the expansion of phrases before and after the noun.' [p.21]

For Langer, meaning resides neither in the writer nor the reader, but in the symbolism of the text itself:

> 'The feeling expressed by this form is neither his [the writer], nor his hero's nor ours. It is the meaning of the symbol... the symbol expresses it at all times and in this sense the poem 'exists' objectively whenever it is presented to us, instead of coming into being only when somebody makes 'certain integrated responses' to what the poet is saying.' [p.211]

This is not, however, an 'art for art's sake' view. Langer fully recognises the author's intentions, which by implication both acknowledge and involve the potential reader. Of the novel in particular, she writes:

> '... it is a fiction, poesis, and its import is formulated feeling.' [p.287]

A little later she adds:

> '... a novelist intends to create a virtual experience, wholly formed and wholly expressive of... something more fundamental than any "modern" problem, human feeling, the nature of human life itself.' [p.288]

As the title of her book implies, it is the exploration and expression of *feeling* which for her distinguishes all works of art from non-aesthetic modes of expression.

Chiefly, however, her passion seems to be for the *artistic form* that embodies this 'virtual experience', conserving it for whoever may care to read. But it would be a mistake to assume that this regard for the supremacy of the text allies Langer to the school of New Criticism, to which she is firmly opposed.

The text may be a symbolic object, but this does not mean that it must become an object for analysis. Langer is scathing about those who treat literary texts analytically, or as Rosenblatt would put it, efferently:

> 'There are critics and especially teachers of rhetoric and poetics, who judge the excellence of a work according to the number of well known virtues they can find in it, somewhat as dogs in a show are judged by "points"... ' [p.282]

Again, I am reminded of the Level Descriptors for writing to which teachers' attention is currently being drawn when they come to read their pupils' stories, where even the 'virtues' are mainly of a secretarial nature.

Jerome Bruner:

Actual Minds, Possible Worlds [1986]

I come to Bruner next, because in some respects like Langer, he focuses on:

> 'the nature of narrative as a mode of thought and as an art form.' [p.x]

He does so principally from two points of view - what distinguishes a work of fiction epistemologically from non-literary forms of discourse, and what it is about its construction that:

> '[makes] it possible for the reader to 'write' his own virtual text.' [p.25]

Let me first of all summarise his epistemological position as I understand it. Bruner maintains that:

> 'There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality.' [p.11]

He takes as his examples:

'a good story and a well formed argument' [p.11]

and suggests that

> 'they differ radically in their procedures for verification. ... Both can be used as means for convincing another. Yet what they convince us *of* is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their life likeness. The one verifies by an eventual appeal to procedures for establishing formal and empirical truth. The other establishes not truth but verisimilitude.' [p.11]

I am unhappy with this distinction between truth on the one hand and verisimilitude on the other because it suggests that truth belongs only to a scientific paradigm and cannot be found in art. I would rather make a distinction between subjective and objective, or logical and poetic modes of expression and exploration, each of which can arrive at a kind of truth which is valid for that mode of coming to know.

Here, in more detail are the epistemological distinctions that Bruner sets out in the second chapter of this book, between what he calls these two modes:

> 'One mode, the paradigmatic or logico-scientific one, attempts to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation. It employs categorisation or conceptualisation... At a gross level, the logico-scientific mode (I shall call it paradigmatic hereafter) deals in general causes, and in their establishment, and makes use of procedures to assure verifiable reference and to test for empirical truth. ...The imaginative application of the paradigmatic mode leads to good theory, tight analysis, logical proof, sound argument and empirical discovery guided by reasoned hypothesis....
>
> The imaginative application of the narrative mode leads instead to good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily 'true') historical accounts. It deals in human

or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course.' [p.13]

This seems to me to be a somewhat Boys' Own account of the function of the narrative mode! Bruner proceeds, however to refer to Paul Ricoeur's 'argument' [1983]:

'that narrative is built upon *concern for the human condition*... while theoretical arguments are simply conclusive or inconclusive.' [my italics][p.13-14]

In considering the educational value of making time for pupils both to write stories and to read them, this concern for what it means to be human, as I explain in the Foreword and in the final chapter, is central to my own approach.

When Bruner turns to:

'forms of discourse that recruit the reader's imagination - that enlist him in the "performance of meaning under the guidance of the text"' [p.25]

he identifies:

'three features of discourse that seem... to be crucial in this enlistment process:

The first is the triggering of *presupposition*, the creation of implicit rather than explicit meanings.

*****

The second is what I shall call *subjectification*: the depiction of reality not through an omniscient eye... but through the filter of consciousness of protagonists in the story.

*****

The third is *multiple perspective*: beholding the world not univocally but simultaneously through a set of prisms each of which catches some part of it.' [pp.25-26]

Together, Bruner suggests that these three features of narrative discourse

> 'succeed in *subjunctivising* reality... trafficking in human possibilities rather than settled certainties.' [p.26]

Between them, they 'enlist the reader in the performance of meaning' as they enable him to create his own virtual text.

Where Langer insists that meaning is inherent in the symbolic text, whilst acknowledging that 'the actual text is unchanged', Bruner suggests that as readers read a story:

> 'the virtual text (to paraphrase Iser) changes almost moment to moment in the act of reading.' [p.7]

Eventually, this virtual text that the reader constructs or 'evokes', becomes 'a story of its own', and it is *this* story, about which the reader must ask 'that crucial interpretive question "What's it all about?"' [p.37]

Ultimately, however, Bruner is not interested so much in the details of the individual reader's symbolisation or interpretation, as he is in:

> 'those two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality.' [p.11]

Wolfgang Iser:

The Act of Reading [1978]

The story, the reader, the 'literary work'

Iser is principally interested in the *act* or the *phenomenology* of reading literature. In the Preface to his book he writes:

> 'As a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response

without analyzing *the reading process*.' [my italics] [p. ix]

Where Langer and Bruner focus on the function of literature as art, Iser's interest is in the nature of what could be said to emerge from the dynamic interaction which takes place between a fictional text on the one hand and its 'concretisation' by the reader on the other. In many respects, he is closer to Rosenblatt [1985] , in focusing on the aesthetic transaction that a reader makes with a fictional narrative, by means of which

> 'the literary work of art comes into being through the reader's attention to what the text *activates within him.*' [my italics]. [p.38]

Like Rosenblatt (who strangely, receives no reference in *The Act of Reading*), Iser acknowledges that no two readings can ever be identical, even when they are made by the same reader:

> 'A second reading of the text will never have the same effect as the first, for the simple reason that the originally assembled meaning is bound to influence the second reading. As we have knowledge that we didn't have before, the imaginary objects accumulating along the time axis cannot follow each other in exactly the same way.' [p.149]

Iser suggests that there are two poles between which the 'literary work' can be said to 'be set in motion': the *artistic* and the *aesthetic*. He locates the artistic pole in 'the author's text' and the aesthetic pole in:

> 'the realisation accomplished by the reader. ... it is clear that the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with the concretisation, but must be situated somewhere between the two. It must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader.' [p.21]

Whilst recognising that without these two poles, the literary work could not come into being, Iser is insistent that:

> 'exclusive concentration on either the author's techniques or the reader's psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself.' [p.21]

It is the *relationship* between the two which:

> 'sets the work in motion, as the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text and relates the different views and patterns to one another.' [p.21]

Iser places equal emphasis on the nature of a fictional narrative as a special kind of construct on the one hand, and the ways in which 'the reader "receives" it by composing it' [p.21] on the other. Phenomenologically, he cannot offer specific examples of such 'compositions' or 'literary works' by virtue of the fact that they are too elusive to capture, as the reader, moment by moment, moves through the text. What he does, therefore, is to analyse in considerable detail, the *potential effect* of a fictional text, without taking his eyes off the *potential reader*.

The implied reader

The concept of the implied reader offers the real reader two 'roles' which inter-relate the nature of the textual structure (at the artistic pole), with the nature of the structural act (at the aesthetic pole). Briefly, the *textual structure* of a novel offers:

> 'four main perspectives: those of the narrator, the characters, the plot and the fictitious reader [which] provide guidelines originating from different starting points, continually shading into each other and devised in such a way that they all converge on a general meeting place...the meaning of the text, which can only be brought into focus if

it is visualised from a standpoint.' [p.35]

The story reader's wandering viewpoint

To arrive at such a standpoint in order to make such a visualisation, a *structural act* is involved during the reading process:

> 'in the course of which the reader's role is *to occupy shifting vantage points*... and to fit the diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern.' [p.35]

I would relate this suggestion, that the story reader is drawn to move between these different perspectives offered by the narrative, to Iser's other suggestion that in taking an aesthetic stance, the reader is not standing outside the text-as-object, but rather adopting

> 'a moving viewpoint which travels along *inside* that which it has to apprehend.' [p.109]

Where Rosenblatt focuses on the reader's internalisation of the story, Iser would appear here to be focusing on entry into the story world.

In differing versions of the Guidelines, I have variously referred to a response which involves the reader's engagement as 'internalising' a story or 'stepping in' to a story or responding to a story 'from the inside'. I eventually came to prefer 'from the inside' because it draws both ways of looking together as it relates to the story world on the one hand and to the reader's mind on the other.

Ideating

In addition to adopting a wandering viewpoint, which necessarily moves back and forth during the act of reading, another structural act to which Iser

attributes great importance, is the act of ideation or forming mental images, which in turn influences changes in the reader's standpoint, from which the different perspectives are joined together as the 'literary work' is evoked:

> 'A sequence of mental images is bound to arise during the reading process... resulting not only in the replacement of images formed but also in a shifting position of the vantage point, which differentiates the attitudes to be adopted in the process of image-building. Thus the vantage point of the reader and the meeting place of perspectives become inter-related *during the ideational activity* and so draw the reader inescapably into the world of the text.' [my italics] [p.36]

Iser describes:

> 'the imagistic vision of the imagination as the attempt to ideate *that which one can never see as such*. The true character of these images consists in the fact that they bring to light aspects which could not have emerged through direct perception of the object. "Imaging" depends upon the absence of that which appears in the image.'
> [my italics][p.137]

In other words, all that the reader actually *sees* are words - the words on the page. I shall never see the castle in *Tom at Terror Towers* or the forest glade in *The Knight and the Mushroom* - or indeed either the knight or the mushroom.

> 'A reality that has no existence has to be ideated by the mind of the reader. A reality that has no existence of its own can only come into being by way of ideation, and so the structure of the text sets off a sequence of mental images which lead to the text translating itself into the reader's consciousness.' [p.38]

In order to create such images in my mind, I must draw upon my memories of the real world in order to "concretise" the text:

> *'The actual content of these mental images will be coloured by the reader's existing stock of experience* [my italics], which acts as a referential background against which the unfamiliar can be conceived and processed.' [p.38]

However, Iser offers an extensive quotation from Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* [1968] about 'the constitutive conditions of such images' which would appear not to take into account the visual recollection of any previous experience:

> 'In answer to the question "How can a person fancy that he sees something, without realising that he is not seeing it?" Ryle says: 'Seeing Helvellyn... in one's mind's eye does not entail, what seeing Helvellyn and seeing snapshots of Helvellyn entail, the having of a visual sensation. It does involve *the thought* of having a view of Helvellyn and it is therefore a more sophisticated operation than that of having a view of Helvellyn. .... The expectations which are fulfilled in the *recognition* at sight of Helvellyn are not indeed fulfilled in *picturing* it, but the picturing is something like a rehearsal, of getting them fulfilled. So far from picturing involving the having of faint sensations, or wraiths of sensations, it involves missing just what one would be due to get, if one were seeing the mountain.'
>
> [my italics][p. 136]

As he expands on his concept of ideating or imaging, Iser appears to perceive the images that occur to the reader as 'virtual' in the sense that they are increasingly reliant on earlier images created in the act of reading. This becomes clear as he distinguishes between seeing the film of *Tom Jones* and reading the book:

> 'The differences between the two types of picture is that

> the film is optical and presents a given object, whereas the imagination remains unfettered. ... When we imagine Tom Jones during our reading of the novel, we have to put together different facets that have been revealed to us at different times - in contrast to the film where we always see him as a whole in every situation.' [p.138]

In this respect, as the reader 'travels through' the book, the images continually change and shade into each other in much the same way as other structural perspectives do. Ideating is one of the ways in which:

> 'the work is set in motion'. [p.22]

The gaps or blanks in the text

What Iser refers to as the gaps or blanks in a narrative text are important in several ways:

1) They draw the reader into the text as he is:

> 'made to supply what is meant from what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning.' [p.168]

2)

> 'Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves.' [p.169]

3)

> 'Blanks leave open the connections between perspectives in the text, and so spur the reader into co-ordinating these perspectives...' [p.169]
> '...the vacancy arising from juxtaposed themes and horizons is occupied by the reader's standpoint from which the various reciprocal transformations lead to the emergence of the aesthetic object.' [p.203]

4)

> '...the shifting blank maps out the path along which the wandering viewpoint is to travel.' [p.203]

5)

> 'The shifting blank is responsible for a sequence of colliding images which condition each other in the time-flow of the reading. ... In this respect, the images hang together in a sequence, and it is by this sequence that the meaning of the text comes alive in the reader's imagination.' [p.203]

It almost begins to seem as if what is not there in a fictional text, is as important for the reader if the virtual text is to be evoked, as what is there in the words on the page. However, without that 'structural text' on the page, there could be no 'structural act' in the mind - both poles, artistic and aesthetic, are necessarily inter-related.

The 'meaning' of a story

Let me conclude my account of Iser's concepts about the *act* of reading, by returning to some comments that he makes in the opening pages of his book:

> 'As meaning arises out of *the process of actualization*, the interpreter should perhaps pay more attention to the process than to the product. ... If he clarifies the potential of the text, he will no longer fall into the fatal trap of trying to impose one meaning on his reader, as if that were the right, or at least the best interpretation. ... an interpreter can no longer claim to teach the reader the meaning of the text, for *without a subjective contribution and a context* there is no such thing. Far more instructive will be an analysis of what actually happens when one is reading a text, for that is when the text begins to unfold its potential; *it is in the reader that the text comes to life...*' [my italics][pp. 18-19]

I have spent considerable time on my own exploration of *The Act of Reading* because Iser investigates the phenomenological nature of the aesthetic transaction between reader and text in more detail than any other reader-response theorist. Reading and reflecting on his work has helped me to distinguish more clearly between the *act* of reading and the *response* which can then be formulated as the reader reflects on that experience, on what has been evoked through interacting with the narrative text.

Norman Holland:

Five Readers Reading [1975]

Focusing on what the individual reader brings to the text

Holland is one of the reader-response theorists who angles the spotlight of attention most directly on the reader and on those psychological aspects of the reader as an individual which she necessarily brings to the text in order to make meaning from it. In *Five Readers Reading* he specifically identifies the content of a story with the reader's virtual text whose meaning is influenced more by his own persona or identity, than by the text itself:

> 'No matter who the reader, or how he reads, *what* he reads will take the general form... a fantasy transformed by defences and adaptations to give pleasure, unity and meaning.' [p.40]

Where Iser is more interested in the function of the implied reader than in the personalities of real readers, and in how the structure of a narrative text gives access to the reader, Holland maintains that:

> 'Texts do not structure content, people do. Formal devices become part of the reading experience *only as they become part of the reader's devices*.' [my italics] [p.16]

Like Rosenblatt, Bruner and Iser, he believes that:

> 'The work finds its fulfillment so to speak when a reader gives it life by re-creating the work in his own mind.' [p.13]

But where they emphasise the guiding influence of the text in this process, Holland emphasises the guiding influence of the reader's psyche.

Experience and response

Also like Rosenblatt, Holland distinguishes usefully between the experience or act of reading and the response which the reader can then make:

> 'We can only understand what a particular reader has experienced after he has experienced it and put forth his recreation and synthesis beyond his own private mind.' [p.13]

In the case of Holland's five readers, this putting forth took place during several lengthy conversations with him. His oral data-gathering in this respect is similar to Squire's, although Holland was more interested in what caused the students to respond as they did, where Squire's attention was directed to categorising the responses themselves.

Unity Identity Text Self [1980]

In this article Holland identifies four aspects of the meaning-making process with regard to reading stories and suggests connections between them, which are represented in the title. **Text** refers to the words-on-the-page and **Self** to the person-in-the-flesh - but psyche as well as body. **Identity** refers to the unchanging essence of that 'Self', operating from 'a central identity theme' and **Unity** is :

> 'to see the whole design of the work as a unity... a simultaneous pattern radiating out from a centre or central theme.' [p.118]

Holland suggests that **Text** and **Self** as they can both be seen to exist - one on the printed page and the other overtly embodied in the individual, are the 'data' from which the **Identity** of the reader (an unchanging essence, operating from a central 'identity theme') can 'impregnate' the '**Unity**' that it is searching for in the text. Taking this perspective of Holland's, both **Identity** in respect of the **Self**, and **Unity** in respect of the **Text**, are the interpretive possibilities which inhabit their 'other halves' and which enable the reader to make meaning and to attribute significance to a story when they are inter-related.

The four principles by means of which Identity and Unity inter-relate

Basically, the four principles that Holland puts forward in this Paper, which enable the reader to make meaning from a story, are identical with those which he proposes in *Five Readers Reading*:

1) Identity recreates itself

We interact with the work - making ourselves part of the literary work as we interpret it. [p.124]

2) Matching our defences

Each of us will find what we characteristically wish or fear the most... the reader constructs his characteristic way of achieving what he wishes and defeating what he fears. [p.125]

3) Deriving fantasies

Once someone has taken into himself through his adaptive strategies some literary work... then he derives from it fantasies of a particular kind which yield him pleasure... in terms of his own identity theme. [p.125]

4) Transforming our fantasies

We usually feel a need to transform raw fantasy into a total experience of aesthetic, moral, intellectual or social coherence and significance. ... All serve to synthesise the experience and make it part of the mind's continuing effort to balance the pressures of the drive for gratification... and one's inner need to avoid emotional and cognitive dissonance.' [p.126]

Holland's epistemological stance

Holland rejects Cartesian dualism:

> 'the belief that the reality and the meaning of the external world exist alone, independent of the perceiving self, and that therefore, true knowledge requires the splitting of the knower from the known.' [p.130]

Where Bruner seeks to keep objective and subjective modes of thought and knowing separate and distinct, Holland wants to see one subsumed within the other:

> 'I am suggesting that a larger law subsumes this 17th century epistemology and points rather to experiencing as an in-gathering and in-mixing of self and other as described by Whitehead... or Dewey or Cassirer or Langer or Husserl.' [p.130]

David Bleich:

Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response [1980]

Where Langer [1953] takes the view that symbolism is inherent in the poetic artefact:

> 'in this sense the poem 'exists' objectively whenever it is presented to us' [p.221]

Bleich would take exactly the opposite view:

> 'The assumption... that all observers have the same perceptual response to a symbolic object creates the illusion that the object is real and that its meaning must reside in it.' [p.135]

Only the 'perceptual symbolisation' *on the part of the reader* has any meaning. The object itself ceases to exist to all intents and purposes. Bleich

gives as an example Michelangelo's *Moses*. Once it is viewed, it becomes:

> 'no longer a block of stone... but a symbolic representation...' [pp.135]

For Langer, it already is a symbolic representation, for Bleich it can only become such in the mind of whoever is looking at it.

Like Bruner and Holland, though from a different perspective, Bleich argues for:

> 'a subjective epistemology [as] a framework through which the *study* of both response and interpretation may be actively integrated with the *experience* of response and interpretation, thereby transforming knowledge from something to be acquired into something that can be synthesized on behalf of oneself and one's community.' [my italics] [p.136]

Like Fish and Scholes, whose theories I shall come to next, Bleich considers the implications of this subjective paradigm in relation to the possibilities for any further interpretation or evaluation. Bleich argues that:

> 'collective similarity of response can be determined only by each individual's announcement of his response and *subsequent communally motivated negotiative comparison.*' [my italics] [p.135]

Bearing in mind the need which I come to consider in the concluding chapters of this thesis, for a form of interpretive assessment that is both warrantable and responsible, it occurs to me that moderation meetings for GCSE provide an excellent example of a forum which is already in place for such 'communally motivated negotiative comparison.'

However, as Tompkins [1980] points out, although Bleich acknowledges the need for a community of interpreters, at the same time, he:

> 'wants to take responsibility for the production of knowledge away from traditional sources of authority: texts, teachers, institutions - and place it in the hands of *all who are engaged in seeking it.* ... What sets Bleich apart... is his perception of the effects a theory of reading can have on the way students respond to literature, on classroom procedures and on the authorisation of interpretations.'
>
> [my italics] [p.xxi]

Let me now come to the work of Fish, whose concept of the nature and function of an 'interpretive community' in relation to reader responses to narrative texts, differs markedly from that put forward by Bleich.

Stanley Fish:

Is There A Text In This Class? [1980]

Before I had the opportunity to read Fish's book, I assumed that his concept of 'interpretive communities' was similar to that put forward by Bleich - ie. a

> 'communally motivated negotiative comparison',

by means of which knowledge could be 'synthesized' by different readers as their unique responses to a story were shared and compared. Not at all!

Fish's proposition is that the meaning that a reader makes of a text, is *already* determined by the interpretive community which taught that reader how to approach such a text in the first place. His interest, therefore, is not so much in the nature of the narrative text or in the psyche of an individual reader as in those 'communities'

> 'whose assumptions about literature determine the kind of attention he pays.' [p.11]

In his introduction to the position which he takes up in the book, Fish usefully traces the changes in his understanding of reader-response theories, initially, from:

> 'replacing "what does this mean" [the text] with "what does this do", redefining meaning as "event" rather than "entity"

From this position, similar to that of Rosenblatt and Iser, Fish moves on to perceiving the response which the reader then makes to this 'event', as influenced not only by his recollection of the act of reading the text (which as he points out is often some distance away), but more influentially:

> 'by his theoretical persuasion.' [p.3]

> 'In other words, it is not that literature exhibits certain formal properties that compel a particular kind of attention; rather paying a particular kind of attention (as defined by what literature is understood to be) results in the emergence into noticeability of the properties *we know in advance* to be "literary".' [p.10]

I have to recognise that in this thesis I am advocating an approach to the reading of pupils' stories and to their interpretive assessment which is indeed influenced by the concepts of those theorists who regard individual responses to individual texts as essential to the making of meaning. The emphasis for me, though, is not so much on a definition of what constitutes literature, as what constitutes a personally meaningful response.

Fish is not concerned so much with individual responses to literary texts, as with those schools of thought which decide what can be defined as a literary text, according to their particular 'interpretive strategies':

> 'Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies [which] exist prior to the act of

reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read.'
[p14]

Thus:

'the entities that were once seen as competing for the right to constrain interpretation (text, reader, author) are now all seen to be the *products* of interpretation.' [my italics][p.16]

Where Bleich wanted to divest the academy and other teaching institutions of their powers to decide on the authorisation of interpretations, Fish invests them with that authority as the literary critical interpretive community. The only freedom which he appears to allow to the individual is to choose the 'sub-community' to which he wishes to belong:

'within the literary community there are sub-communities... and within any community the boundaries of the acceptable are continually being redrawn.' [p.343]

It is not clear, however, to what extent students are likely to have any influence in re-drawing those boundaries, as well as their professors. Somehow I doubt that students would have much of a say, as those who already have decision-making powers about the boundaries, tend to hang on to them. Bleich's desire for 'all to be engaged' is more overtly democratic but not as likely to occur in practice!.

Also not clear, is the extent to which other communities might influence our interpretations of a narrative text alongside schools of literary criticism. How might a feminist or a political interpretive community affect my response differently from the way I have been taught to approach reading as a student and as a teacher? Fish is not helpful in sorting out such conflicting influences.

Robert Scholes:

Textual Power [1985]

In his book, Scholes offers a critique of Fish's 'interpretive communities' which attacks:

> 'the notion... as vague, inconsistently applied and unworkable.' [p.149]

He points out that according to Fish, an interpretive community can vary from something as specific as:

> 'those who share certain linguistic and cultural information',

to something as broad as:

> 'all Christian readers of a literary text.' [p.150]

He argues that:

> 'there must be as many communities as there are different interpretations. Therefore an interpretive community could not coincide with a paradigm or a discipline... or even a school of criticism: Marxist, Structuralist, Feminist, New Critical etc. - for the simple reason that so many interpretive disputes occur within each of these schools rather than between them.' [p.155]

Scholes' central question throughout *Textual Power*, is:

> 'What texts should we teach... and how should we teach them?' [p.16]

Like Elliot Eisner [1993] arguing for a greater openness to diverse forms of presentation in Educational Research, Scholes argues that what should be taught in university English Departments, should include:

> 'all kinds of texts, visual as well as verbal...' [p.16]

Not for Scholes literary canons of any kind, rather:

> 'Literature as a category must be discarded.' [p.16]

Having made such a strong claim, I find it somewhat ironic, that throughout *Textual Power*, Scholes reverts to taking examples exclusively for 'What texts should we teach?' from works of fiction.

How should we teach them?

This question refers to both texts and students. As far as students are concerned, Scholes, like Wilson, is very much in favour of encouraging their active participation as meaning makers:

> 'If... heightened awareness is to be the end of our endeavours, we shall have to see it not as something transmitted from the text but as something developed in the student by questioning the text.' [p.13]

He regards it as the teacher's job:

> 'to explain the rules of the interpreter's game.' [p.30]

and:

> 'to provide the analytical tools that will help students penetrate the clever surface of texts' [p.55]

It is not the teacher's job to do their thinking for them; Scholes warns against the teacherly temptation of showing off in front of a class!

Textual competencies

Scholes suggests:

> 'three related skills [or] aspects of textual competence that cannot be divided into separate bits, but are sufficiently distinguishable ... for us to present them to our students as *discrete enterprises that may be practised separately*.'

[my italics][p.21]

Scholes' three competencies for reading development, *Reading, Interpretation* and *Criticism*, to some extent resemble the four categories proposed by Purves [1968]. Briefly, this is how Scholes defines each of them:

Reading

> 'We can only read a story if we ... understand the basic elements of narrative coding. Such a reader *constructs a whole world* from a few indications, fills in the gaps, makes temporal correlations, performs those essential activities that Umberto Ecco called writing 'ghost chapters' and taking "inferential walks". ' [my italics] [p.22]

In this respect, what Scholes later describes as 'producing text within text' [p.24] would appear phenomenologically, to resemble Rosenblatt's 'poem' , Iser's 'literary work' and Bruner's 'virtual text'..

However, unlike Iser, at this initial stage of the meaning-making process, Scholes firmly re-instates the writer, and the relationship of reader to writer, in a manner reminiscent of Georges Poulet [1980]. Poulet regarded the reader's role generally as essentially passive:

> 'to be immersed in the author's mode of experiencing the world.'[p.xiv]

Scholes regards this uncritical entry into the story as the author has presented it, as an essential preliminary to the other skills which ultimately stem from that act of engagement:

> 'Reading - as a *submission to the representation of another* - is the first step in all thought and all communication... but it is incomplete in itself. It requires both interpretation and

criticism for completion.' [my italics][p.40]

Interpretation

According to Scholes, to become interpretively competent at a basic level, a reader requires background knowledge - about the conditions in the trenches, for instance, in World War I, if a story takes place in such a setting.

> 'But these functions are only "interpretation" in the service of "reading"; they are not interpretation proper, which is the thematising of a text [where] we move from the level of the specific events narrated, to a more general level of social types and ethical values.' [p.29]

In contrast to Purves's definition of *Interpretation*, in which the reader is seeking to draw out those themes which relate her own view of the world, Scholes focuses interpretation on the perceived intentions of the author - in relation to the wider world *as the author perceived it*.. This is why historical information may also be necessary:

> 'The interpretation of any single literary text... will lead us to cultural history itself - which is of course a major part of our educational responsibility as teachers of literature.' [p.35]

In Scholes' framework for response, writer, text and reader (and also teacher), are all firmly back in place.

In moving from the production of his own 'text within a text' to focusing on the implied themes, Scholes suggests several narrative patterns that readers can be encouraged to look for:

> 'Repetitions and Oppositions [and] relationships of Similarity and Difference.' [p.32]

Having distinguished such features, readers can then move on to

considering what such features represent. This will involve the reader in:

> 'connecting the singular oppositions of the text to the generalised oppositions that structure our cultural systems of values... making connections between a particular verbal text and a larger cultural text.' [p.33]

The larger cultural text, in this instance, is that during which the work under consideration was actually written. Without this contemporary knowledge, the reader cannot bring his third competency, *criticism*, into play.

Criticism

Once the reader has submitted himself to the fictional text as the author conceived it, and identified themes in the story which reflect the author's values and intentions in the cultural context of his own day, he is then in a position to relate those themes and values to those of his own culture:

> 'taking a stand outside the values and attitudes that have been identified [as the author's] by reading and interpretation. Criticism is 'against other texts' in so far as it resists them *in the name of the critic's recognition of her or his own values*.' [my italics][p.38]

Thus, what was defined as *Interpretation* by Purves, becomes *Criticism,* at least to some extent, for Scholes.

Throughout his schema for the development of the reader's response, Scholes' competencies are subjectively meaning-related.They never regard a narrative text solely as an object for analysis. At the *reading* stage:

> 'A student needs to feel the power of a text, to experience the pleasures obtainable only through submission, before he or she can begin to question both that pleasure and its requisite submission.' [p.41]

At the *interpretive* stage, the patterns that a reader must look for in order to extrapolate a central theme or themes, are closely related to the settings, events or behaviours which in themselves are unique to a particular story.

At the most fully developed stage of reading competency, the *critical* stage, the reader must relate the values of the author, which are implicit in the themes arrived at through interpretation, to the values which he holds in the context of his own contemporary culture.

His final role as a reader, is to compare and contrast these values, actively questioning differing views about the world and the behaviour of human beings within it:

> 'Our students must be invited into these critical debates...
> they must see 'naturalism' and 'aestheticism' not simply as
> styles or modes of production in an isolated realm of 'art'
> but *as world views with social consequences*.'
>
> [my italics][p.38]

In this respect, Scholes' schema for reading development, is not only related to the particularities of the story, but crucially to our values in the real world outside that story.

Mikhail Bakhtin and Michael Holquist:

Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World [1982]

In my account of Scholes' theories, I have described his schema for how a reader's response to a narrative text might be developed, which ultimately leads out of the world of the novel as the author conceived it into the real world as the reader conceives it. Bakhtin bases the special value which he

places upon fictional texts and our reading of them on his general philosophy about the world as we experience it. I have included Holquist's name alongside Bakhtin's because I am indebted to the former for his exposition of Bakhtin's philosophy; all page references are to Holquist's book.

I found that Bakhtin spoke directly to my own values as an English teacher and as a human being. What appealed to me strongly about his philosophy of dialogism, was the way in which he describes how each of us authors our own lives, through our capacities as language users to maintain a constant flow of dialogue between Self and Other, and then relates this making of meaning to the meanings created by story tellers and story writers:

> 'What happens in an utterance, no matter how commonplace, is always more ordered than what happens outside an utterance. We discharge our responsibility by putting meaningless chaos into meaningful patterns through the authorial enterprise of translating 'life' outside language into the patterns afforded by words, by sentences and above all, by narrative of various kinds. First of all into anecdotal, everyday speech, more powerfully and perceptively into literature.' [p.84]

He provided powerful support for my view that pupils' stories, however inexperienced as writers they may be, deserve the same kind of meaningful, dialogic response as those of more experienced authors. What he had to say about 'authoring' also gave me encouragement to continue with the story of my own research journey at a point when I was in danger of getting bogged down.

Dialogism: an epistemology of relativity and relationships

Bakhtin insists on the ***relativity*** of our perceptions about everything:

> 'Dialogism argues that all meaning is relative... there is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future.' [p.39]

Whilst rejecting the dialectical concept of contradictory opposites, he recognises the existence of many fundamental 'dualisms', which far from conflictng with each other, gain meaning and significance from the *relationship* which binds them inseparably together, such as:

> 'self/other; particular/universal; utterance/language; unrepeatable/repeatable; flux/fixity.'

He regards all such dualisms as relative in the sense that they are 'asymmetrical', in a constant state of tension with each other and he insists that it is only through incessant dialogue - with others and with the self - that the significance of these relationships can be established and explored.

The essential role of language in authoring our lives

Bakhtin allocates a key role to the ability that human beings have to represent their lived experiences through language, both in speech and in writing. Without such an ability, the dialogic process which underpins his entire philosophy, would be impossible. He regards 'authoring' as:

> 'the active constructive role of mind in perception.' [p.33]

For Bakhtin, as for Vygotsky [1962], the process normally described as 'learning to talk' is also 'learning to think'. Like Vygotsky [1978], Bakhtin recognises both the crucial function of language as a means of communication with others, and also as a means of engaging in a dialogue with the self, through inner speech.

It is through both these forms of dialogue - internal as well as external - that human beings become capable of perceiving patterns in their experiences which give coherence and meaning to their lives. Bakhtin affirms this to be the case for all individuals situated in the particularity of their personal time and place, within the encircling time and place of their historical and cultural environment. Thus, his self/other, figure/ground approach allows for influences which people living in the same historical setting share, whilst at the same time recognising the uniqueness of any one person's experiences:

> 'Dialogism makes a radical commitment to the historical particularity of any act of perception - as it is actually experienced by living persons from their unique place in existence.' [p.148]

Bakhtin regards this 'authoring' of the unique situation in time and place in which each individual finds himself, as a responsibility which the self is required to undertake:

> 'It is largely the way I use language that lets me 'sign my name' in this responsible sense.' [p.168]

Where speaking and writing are concerned, Bakhtin recognises, indeed stresses, both the inseparability and at the same time, the different functions of *utterance* on the one hand, and *language* on the other. It is the same distinction that Saussure drew between *parole* and *langue*; but where Saussure focuses his linguistic analysis solely on *langue* on the grounds that the generally discernible patterns of language are repeatable, (unlike the idiosyncratic utterances of the individual speaker or writer), Bakhtin insists on the inseparability of the relationship between the two:

> ... 'the nature of the linguistic sign is synergistic, a constant struggle and co-operation between the necessity to be static and repeatable, and the opposed but no less

> imperative necessity of the same material to be open to constantly new and changing circumstances.' [p.175]

Values

> 'Where there is a need for choosing, there is a need for values.' [p.156]

For Bakhtin, authoring inevitably involves valuing on the part of the thinker/perceiver. Holquist comments that:

> 'the issue of value requires us to invoke two terms that Post-structuralism has rendered notoriously suspect "human subject" and "intention".' [p.154]

Bakhtin argues that:

> '[we] always combine spatial and temporal factors with an evaluation of their significance as judged from a particular point of view.' [p.152]

In other words, we cannot escape the responsibility to interpret and evaluate, as we author our experiences. As Holquist observes

> 'Perception is never pure, it is always accompanied in terms of evaluating what is perceived.' [p.152]

'Novelness' and the novel as a work of art

Bakhtin points to a continuum between everyday authoring through overt and inner speech and narrative construed as an art form:

> 'Dialogism assumes that all speech activity possesses a high degree of internal organisation: the distinctiveness of what we call a literary text is that it manifests this quality in the highest degree. [p85] ... Both art and lived experience are aspects of the same phenomenon, the *heteroglossia* of words, values and actions.' [p. 111]

Novelness is the name Bakhtin gives to a form of expression that can most powerfully put different orders of experience (each of whose language claims authority on the basis of its ability to exclude others), *into dialogue with each other.* Above all, it is the novelist's ability to incorporate many different forms of discourse, which link this genre most intimately with the authoring in which we constantly engage as part of our everyday lives:

> 'The novel's relation to everyday talk is particularly significant because it is the variety of language, the constant reminders of the otherness of speech that constitutes the novel's characteristic subject, as well as its formal features.' [p.76]

Bakhtin is careful, however, to avoid the proposition that there is a direct 'realistic' reflection of the experienced world in literature:

> 'When a man is in art, he is not in life and vice versa.'
> [p.111]

In this respect, I am reminded of the distinction that Langer makes between the first hand experience of living and the virtual experience of poetic discourse. Similarly, for Bruner, what the novel achieves is *verisimilitude* - life likeness, but not life itself.

Bakhtin believed that in the authoring of our everyday lives, we are not capable of crossing the boundary between Self and Other, even though we are always aware of it. Aesthetic, artistic authoring on the other hand, has that 'negative capability' to which Keats refers in his letters, to make an imaginative projection into otherness. It is this element or feature (which Bakhtin called *transgredience*), which renders the novel important in a perceptual as well as in a literary sense.

He considered storying at its most powerful, in novels of the highest aesthetic quality, as being the most perceptive form of meaning-making that any human being could produce:

> 'Literature, when it enacts 'novelness' is a loophole through which we may see a future otherwise obscured by other forms of discourse.' [p.83] ;
> and again:
> 'Literature is a particularly potent means by which consciousness transmits itself in the form of coherent and durable patterns of culture. Literature enables the *future* of culture to be exploited as a zone of proximal development.'
> [p.84]

Unlike some of the post-modernists, Bakhtin does not take the view that as story writers and story readers we are merely puppets of the cultures in which we live. His concept of relativity allows for both the individual and his culture to have a voice in the authoring of experience - and the most perceptive and illuminating voices of all, are those of story tellers.

James Britton

Before I come to a consideration of Britton's concepts about the responses that we can make as story readers, I want to acknowledge a personal debt. Where my encounter with Rosenblatt's work has exercised a major influence on the development of my perceptions about the nature of a personally meaningful, aesthetic response to stories, my encounter with Britton's work and with Jimmy himself, has exercised a major influence for the past forty years on the growth of my perceptions as an educator. In *The Word for Teaching Is Learning* [1988] I acknowledge this debt as follows:

> 'Sometimes teachers, including me, have the great good fortune of working with someone truly wise. I do not use

from thinking as a teacher, to thinking as a learner again. It is thanks to him that everything I have tried to do in my job as an English Adviser has been focused on learning - for teachers as well as for their pupils - and of course for me too.' [p.270]

Response to Literature [R/L][1968], and *Literature in Its Place* [L/P][1993]

Like Bakhtin, Britton draws close connections between the worlds that are created in stories and the world in which we live out our lives. Like Bakhtin he regards the capacity that humans have to represent their experience of the world symbolically through language, as the bond which joins the authoring of our own lives with the authoring of potential lives in fiction. Like Bakhtin he recognises the uniqueness of the teller and the telling, in the stories we weave about ourselves and the stories we imagine about others.

For Britton:

'literature exists as a means of recording and contemplating whatever it is that makes our lives uniquely our own and unrepeatable, part of the network of relations that make up society.' [p.80] [L/P]

He draws on the work of D.W.Harding [1937, 1967] in distinguishing between two courses which are open to humans as language users - we can: 'operate in the real world' by means of our capacity to represent it at first hand, or we can 'operate *directly upon the representation itself*'. Britton describes the stance we take in this second kind of mental operation as taking up:

'the role of spectators: spectators of our own past lives, our imagined futures, other men's lives, impossible events...' [p.9] [R/L]

It is a stance which can be taken up by both writers and readers of stories but though it is reflective, standing back from the decision-making demands of the outer world, it is neither passive nor coolly analytic:

> '...these reflections are not analytic in manner, rather they constitute reflection by re-enactment - or in the case of imagined experiences... by a kind of rehearsal that might be called virtual re-enactment.' [p.54] [L/P]

Moreover, when we take up a spectator role, whether as a writer or a reader:

> 'There is always in some degree, an indication of how we feel about someone or something; our words carry the pluses and minuses of our verdicts on the world.' [p.86] [L/P]

Thus, in withdrawing from direct contact with the real world, we are not divorcing ourselves from it. The spectator role is not escapist in this sense; rather whether we are reading stories or writing them, our thoughts and feelings are involved in a reconsideration of whatever the act of living involves:

> 'We certainly expect of a work of literature that it will embody *an evaluation of experience* and will not merely record the circumstances, the events and encounters of life as we live it. The culture of any society consists in the evolving accumulation of such evaluations... It is by means of *the individual responses*, whether to the events of our lives or to works of art... that cultural mores are determined.' [my italics][p.84] [L/P]

It is this regard for individual perceptions, whether 'recording or contemplating' as writers or readers, as adults or as children, which characterises Britton's views as an educator. He is adamant that:

> ' A sense of literary form must grow from within' [p.5] [R/L]

and that the roots from which it grows must be fed from 'the past satisfactions' that individual readers and writers have experienced.

The 'sense of literary form' which best describes the development of story readers (and story writers) is meaning-related rather than technique-related, in that it refers to 'a sense of the pattern of events.' [p.4] [R/L]

On the one hand, this sense of form:

> 'increases as our frame of reference of reality grows with experience, primary and secondary of the world we live in.' [p.5] [R/L]

On the other hand, it:

> 'increases as we find satisfaction in works which, by their complexity or the subtlety of their distinctions, their scope, or their unexpectedness, make greater and greater demands upon us.' [p.5] [R/L]

Thus the dynamic relationship of growth in authoring complexity in our own experiences and growth in perceiving complexity in a literary text comes into play.

The continuum between children and adult story readers and writers

Out of all the response theorists to whom I have referred in this long chapter, Britton is the only one who considers whether the responses of young and inexperienced readers and writers can be regarded as similar *in kind* to those of grown up experts. In this respect I find his work directly relevant to my own concerns. As I draw to the close of my survey in high pastures, what he has to say, may help to ground us once again in classroom practice.

In his Paper *Response to Literature* which he presented to the academics at the Dartmouth Seminar in the US in 1966, and from which I have been quoting, Britton raises the question:

> 'Is a naive [reader] response different in kind... or merely different in intensity of feeling or complexity or comprehensiveness or verisimilitude? ... are such responses (and children must make many of them) the bad currency we seek to drive out, or are they the tender shoots that must be fostered if there is to be a flower at all?' [p.3-4]
>
> [R/L]

Finally, in the book he wrote twenty five years later, published the year before his death, Britton has this to say about children as story writers:

> 'Focusing on what is offered - and I am thinking at the moment principally of something written by a child - what is offered has what might be seen as an in-built *direction*. It is likely to be going somewhere, because the writer's approval of her/his own work goes with it, and we learn from experience that what satisfies him/her today is likely to lead to further demands next time. This is a movement of change by which a writer builds a highway of past satisfactions. And the message for us teachers is that we should not discourage early enthusiasms because they are art-like in what may seem to us crude ways. It is up to us to recall that they travel the road we ourselves set out upon.' [p.86] [L/P]

Chapter Ten

Asking questions and making connections

As he embarks on his chapter '*Poetic Discourse*' in *Literature in its Place* [1993] Britton comments:

> 'There is a great temptation, I believe, to strain after the striking, often puzzling, clever comments that scholars and original thinkers have made... But how do we understand and apply such insights? I believe the best way is to begin from the firm basis of what one knows from one's own experience - experience of poetry, of one's own responses to it, and their relation to life as we live it.' [p.54]

Traditionally, I might have been expected to initiate my research enquiry by consulting the literary theorists whose work I have just described in the previous chapter. I felt more comfortable starting from familiar ground, based on my own experience of stories and how I was moved to respond to stories written by children as well as by professional authors. I knew as a reader, that unless my own *thoughts* and *feelings* and *impressions* about what was happening in a story were actively engaged, it would fail to come alive for me.

At the same time, I was aware that my development as a reader from the small child who loved to listen to bedtime stories, to the English teacher who wanted to share my passion for stories with my pupils, had also involved a growing appreciation for the way their writers had created such enthralling narratives. This was also a kind of response that was personally meaningful to me which increased the pleasure that I took in the reading experience.

Thus, as I have described in the early chapters of this thesis, initially my investigation involved the encouragement and collection from teachers of

these two kinds of response, **Engagement** and **Appreciation**, in order to develop a more detailed picture of what a personally meaningful response to a pupil's story might entail, for others as well as for myself. A close analysis of these written responses (which I came to regard in Rosenblatt's terminology as aesthetic transactions with a text), enabled me to construct the 'reference maps' or 'frameworks' which are described in Chapter 8.

I have now reached a stage in my journey where I feel able to position my research in relation to other reader-response concepts as I look for points of comparison and contrast. There will be connections that I can now make, between the kind of story responses that I have described resulting from my own enquiry and those to which other writers in this field have attended.

Principally, I am keenly aware of the ***differences*** which have emerged between us, with regard to *readers*, *texts* and *writers*. It is time to establish what these differences are, along with the questions which they raise.

Teachers as story readers

The first major difference is that so far, my investigation has focused on ***teachers*** as story readers. Where response theorists are interested either in abstract concepts of the reader's function (ideal or implied), or in students' responses to literature, I am interested in the responses that teachers make to stories written by their pupils. Commonly, such responses are expected to be efferent, focusing on the information to be acquired and passed on about the pupil's skills (or deficiencies) as a writer. The stance which a teacher takes as a reader, is largely that of an efferent assessor, designed to extract and to pass on information. Her involvement with the story itself is of secondary importance; it is what the text reveals about the pupil's

competencies that chiefly engages the teacher-reader's attention.

Whether their analysis is philosophical, phenomenological, psychological or educational, response theorists all agree that if stories are to become meaningful, they must involve the reader in some act of the imagination. There is no such agreement in the teaching profession with regard to the responses that teachers make to children's stories. I have described in Chapter 7 how some of the teachers participating in my research felt confused or uncertain about the relevance of making an engaged response to written work from a pupil.

For instance, when I ask Kevin:

Do you now have a clear idea of what I'm trying for, in saying share your experience of the story with the writer?

he replies:

I know what you mean in theory - it's when I come down to actual practice that I run into difficulties.

Andy talks of:

...that critical side of me, the kind of "This is what I think you should do to get better at writing stories" - it's that, when I was reading their stories that was coming out. I could have done that easily! It's this other thing about responding to the kid's story as a story...

I now have to ask myself whether my Guidelines were successful in encouraging teachers to respond aesthetically to their pupils' stories, and if they were, to what educational effect.

First, though, let me tease out the different respects in which the term

aesthetic can apply to different *stages* in the reading process. Rosenblatt [1985] pinpoints these stages most clearly.

Firstly, the ***stance*** which the reader chooses to adopt from the moment she starts to read the story, can be aesthetic, in the sense that the reader is prepared to be responsive to:

> 'the qualitative overtones of the ideas, images, situations and characters'. [p.297]

It is the reader's stance which will affect:

> 'where he or she turns his or her attention during the transaction with the text.' [p.297]

The ***transaction*** which the reader makes with the text becomes aesthetic, in the sense that it is experiential:

> 'what [the reader] is living through during the reading event' [p.297]

It is through the transaction or the interplay of reader/text that the evocation occurs.

The ***evocation*** - what the reader 'makes' of the story inside her head, during the act of reading, is also aesthetic in the sense that it becomes another story rising out of the transaction that is taking place. This version created by the reader from the words on the page, is variously referred to by theorists as the '*virtual experience*' [Langer], the '*literary work*' [Iser] or the '*virtual text*' [Bruner].

Fourthly, the ***response*** which the reader can then choose to make, with reference to the virtual text that he or she has created during the act of

reading, will also be aesthetic in the sense that it recollects the thoughts, feelings and impressions that were activated in the reader's mind as her eyes took in the words on the page. Rosenblatt [1985] describes an aesthetic *response* as follows:

> 'Later reflections on the transaction can be seen as an effort a) to recapture, to re-enact the evocation, and b) to organize or elaborate our ongoing responses to it.' [p.299]

Clearly, all these activities are closely inter-related aesthetically speaking. They lead from choice of stance, through the act of reading to the virtual text and finally to the reader's recollection of that evocation. What the reader makes of the story lies at the heart of this whole sequence. It is the *virtual* text which is evoked as a result of the reader's stance and transaction with the story, to which an aesthetic response can be made.

My first question, therefore, in relation to my own research is:

1) Do the responses which the teachers and I made, indicate that we were able to evoke our own virtual texts ?

Pupils' stories

The second major difference between my work up to this point and that of the response theorists, is that the stories collected as data for my research have been written by 8-15 year olds, not by professional authors. Other theorists have published 'Literature' in mind, in their considerations of the nature of a literary text - ie. short stories or novels written by authors who are traditionally highly regarded in the canon of American and European literature, such as Henry Fielding (Iser), James Joyce (Bruner) John Steinbeck (Wilson), Ernest Hemingway (Scholes). Many of these texts are long and complex. The longest story in my collection is ten pages in length,

and the shortest less than a page.

Rosenblatt [1985] suggests that:

> 'Extrinsic or intrinsic cues [in texts] suggest the general stance to adopt - whether primarily efferent or aesthetic - since this provides *the basic principles for selecting what to pay attention to.*' [my italics][p.297]

But as I describe in Chapter 17, pupils' stories provide both kinds of cues! If, for instance, criteria such as those for story writing in KS2 and 3 SATs indicate that teachers should look for correct spelling and punctuation, increasingly complex sentence construction and specific narrative techniques, they will be predisposed to adopt an efferent stance because those are the cues they will be looking for.

If, on the other hand, they choose to look for the kind of cues described by Iser, which *involve* them in the writer's text and 'set the work in motion' they will then have adopted an aesthetic stance which could set in train those other reading processes which I have delineated. For a teacher, faced continually with efferent assessment requirements, I believe that in order to take this alternative stance, a conscious choice must be taken, which acknowledges the value of giving close attention to the story *as a story.*

My second question, therefore, in relation to my own research, relates to whether these stories by young learner writers can offer sufficient 'cues' to activate an aesthetic stance.

2) Are the constructions of these simpler narratives sufficiently comparable to those of more experienced authors to activate an aesthetic transaction between text and reader?

Pupil writers

Two further differences relate to the *classroom context* in which these stories are produced and read. Teachers know their pupils and interact with them daily. Neither the conceptual analyses of narrative texts by theorists such as Langer, Iser, Bruner and Bakhtin nor the responses made by students in the research reports of Squire, Wilson, Purves and Holland, are ever addressed directly to the author, who may not even be alive, and is certainly not personally known to the respondents. As I consider the second kind of response elicited by my Guidelines, in which the pupil writer's handling of the narrative is the focus of the reader's attention, I shall ask myself the question:

3) Is this personal contact with the writer a factor in enabling our appreciative responses to retain an engaged or aesthetic stance?

Experienced readers

Finally, here is my fourth difference: the students in the Squire [1964], Wilson [1966] and Purves [1968] surveys, were responding as relatively inexperienced readers to published stories by professional writers. In my research up to this point, I had asked primary and secondary teachers to respond as relatively experienced readers to stories written by learner writers. As I re-consider our responses - engaged and appreciative with this difference in mind, I shall be asking the question:

4) Do our responses as experienced readers, provide potentially useful feedback for pupils - as story writers and as story readers?

With these questions in mind, I shall now consider in what respects reading-

response theories are pertinent to the responses which I and the participating teachers made to stories written by pupils. *Given the differences which I have just outlined, is there sufficient common ground to justify my claim that these stories, too, merit a reader-response from teachers - and in what respects could such responses be said to have educational value?*

Engaging with the pupils' stories

Question 1

Do the responses which the teachers and I made, indicate that we were able to evoke our own virtual texts?

Is there evidence in our responses that we were able to take up such a contributory role, in order to evoke a 'virtual text'? Bearing in mind that the phenomenological dynamics of the act of reading can never fully be recaptured, can our responses be said to imply the existence of a unique version or evocation, created by each of us as individual readers in relation to individual stories?

Variations in our perceptions of the same text

In Chapter 3 as I compared the first responses that came in as data in the early stages of the research, I commented on the variations that were apparent between Jill's 'reading' of *Lost Underground Treasure* and mine. Jill seeks to make sense of certain details in the story:

'At first... I thought... and then I realised...'

I focus on Dorothy's behaviour and on what I can visualise. In this respect our virtual texts highlight different aspects of the original story.

I now want to consider two further examples where the teacher and I were

responding to the same story, in order to demonstrate how what we each 'made' of the story differed, as our comments indicate:

Fiona's response to '*The Haunted House*'

I was very worried when you ignored the bat, especially after seeing pictures of vampires on the walls. I really liked the fact that although you were scared, you plucked up your courage and told the ghost to stop scaring people. I thought that it was funny when the ghosts told you the only reason they scare people is that's what they're supposed to do! They were certainly put to much better use putting on shows in Scotland.

My response to '*The Haunted House*'

What I like best about this story is the way that you take control of the situation and end up managing the ghosts in a very entrepreneurial way! In spite of the lightning and the cobwebs and the pictures of ghosts and vampires, when push comes to shove you are not in the least bit frightened and boss the ghosts about instead. I must say that they're a pretty feeble lot, especially when they say 'We're supposed to frighten people.' Perhaps their hearts aren't in it - if ghosts have hearts that is.

In our responses we reveal how we each reacted differently, as we read the story, to the central character's passage through the house. Fiona is prepared to believe that because the setting is scary, at first the boy is also scared. So she worries for him and admires his courage in speaking out to the ghost. In my version, on the other hand, I do not perceive our 'hero' as being frightened at all - my feelings are more of admiration for his managerial skills. Later, Fiona finds the ghosts amusing, where I view them with some derision. I make these points to indicate how what readers feel and think as they evoke their own virtual texts can differ, even with a story as

short as Dwayne's.

Excerpts from the responses that Kate and I make to *Crying Wolf*, also reveal interesting variations in the virtual texts that we create in our own minds as we are drawn to different aspects of the story which variously engage our attention, then form themselves into different patterns as we 'organise or elaborate our on-going responses'. Kate responds empathetically from the start and her feelings continue to colour her view of what is happening. I am struck by the way that I am taken at contrasting speeds through the plot; consequently, this cluster of references as I recollect my experience of the story, all relate, for me, to these internal perceptions of movement.

Part of Kate's response to *Crying Wolf*

Straightaway I am gripped by the atmosphere of the story, a gloomy church, a dead body. I am aware that Steve is vulnerable because of his previous trouble and I am worried that nobody appears to be believing him. I feel concerned for Steve, knowing there is a killer on the loose and no-one believes him. This is made even tenser because I am not sure the policeman will go for help - my feeling is he won't.
The tension continues to be built up as he goes into town and is followed by a strange man. It interests me how cool he stays in this episode, particularly when he sees the newspaper. I suppose he feels safe because he's told the police.
When he meets his end at the church it is almost a relief because I am waiting for it all the time.

Part of my response to *Crying Wolf*

I like the way that there is a contrast between things

happening at a different pace in this story. At first, to me, it's almost like a slow motion film as Steve strolls downstairs. He then storms out and the pace quickens but then it slows again as he slowly collects his cleaning equipment together - and even more slowly takes an hour to scrub off the last word of his graffiti message. He slumps in the church with aching arms [slow] then discovers the body and rushes home [fast]. Then slowly, slowly, the clock ticks round to 3.00, while he lunches in town, collects his cleaning things again and returns to the church. Another half hour drags by - and then suddenly it's over and Steve is dead.In a way, slowing it down like that, helped to create a sense of inevitability about the end.

I am intrigued as I notice how the contours of meaning change, as we each recollect what stood out for us as we travelled through the tale. For each of us there are those 'qualitative overtones' to which we are responsive, but as individuals we perceive them differently as we transact with the text.

Interpretive responses

In her description of a reader's evocation of a 'literary work', Rosenblatt [1985] writes:

> 'We participate in [the characters'] relationships and at the same time, we respond with approval or disapproval to their words and actions. We see parallels in our own lives.'
>
> [p.299]

Interpretation involves a widening of perspectives in which the particularities of a story are related by the reader to the world outside the story and to her own life experiences in that world. Whatever their differences of opinion, all the reader response theorists to whom I referred in the previous chapter agree on this point.

Sometimes in our responses to the pupils' stories, our interpretations are made as it were, 'en passant':

The girls seem very disorganised in the story...;[23]

I think Jodie is very sensible not to go into the boarded up house... on her own;[8]

I think she was wise to opt for a friendship that was tried and tested rather than a love affair which might not have lasted very long anyway![9]

On other occasions, we comment at greater length on actions that have an implied significance to which we can relate. This is particularly clear in Chris's response to *The Knight and the Mushroom*:

Once all these strange events start with the mushrooms, I suppose what I find most interesting about your story is the way that things change.First of all it is as if the knight has great power, and this is brought out in the way he grabs the mushrooms and then throws stones at them when one will not budge. But we are reminded of the knight's own weakness and vulnerability and so the tables are turned and he is in need of help from the mushroom, which is given a kind of character.
You then seem to set up all sorts of interesting themes which I really found quite moving, in this unusual story. There was the growth of trust between the two 'characters' - the mushroom and the knight, and there was a hopeful ending as the knight appeared to have been offered salvation and help from an unlikely source. I believed his promise at the end and by then had developed more sympathy to him as a character.
So maybe there were themes of friendship and companionship which began to emerge towards the end. Altogether, I found it fascinating and unusual, and the final line left me with a feeling that there might be more hardship ahead for the knight, although now with help.There is a feeling of new hope, but not total safety, as he rides off into the

moonlight.

Initially, the teacher had commented on the 'mysterious setting' and the 'eerie atmosphere' of the 'weird scene' but as he reads further into the story, it is the thematic significance which engages his attention: the knight's 'weakness and vulnerability' and his initial desire to get his way by force through tearing up the mushroom. But then Chris perceives and responds to 'the growth of trust' which leads him to take a more hopeful view of the outcome when the knight rides off with the mushroom in his pouch:

I believed his promise at the end and by then had developed more sympathy for him as a character.

In drawing attention to the shift from the knight's initial aggression to 'the themes of friendship and companionship which began to emerge' and in expressing how this causes him both to sympathise with the knight and to take a more hopeful view of the outcome, what the teacher himself values about human relationships is also being offered as part of the personal response which he is making to the pupil.

At the time of writing this chapter, much attention is being given in the press, based on comments coming from politicians of all parties and other interest groups, to the question of the moral and spiritual education of young people, and to the role that teachers can play. I refer to this important issue here, because I believe that my research indicates quite clearly that writing stories, on the one hand, offers children and teenagers the opportunity to explore human behaviours through imaginative improvisation, which partly draws upon whatever experiences they already possess and partly extends those in an exploration of further possibilities.

On the other hand, their stories also offer teachers who are willing to respond aesthetically, the opportunity to reflect on the moral considerations which the behaviour of the characters raises for them. Pupils' stories can provide a valuable middle ground for such issues to be discussed without the teacher's views coming into direct confrontation with the views of the writer. In much the same way, teachers and pupils can meet in their discussion of the characters' behaviours in the literature which they read together. The difference is that these are stories written by the pupils' themselves, and on occasions, if the context for writing has been successful, they offer a window onto the way they currently look at their own world.

I conclude this section on our interpretive responses with three examples which indicate how my own values are reflected in my comments on the behaviour of the characters in the imaginary worlds which their writers have created. In the first of these I refer with approval to the independence and self reliance of the heroine of the tale. In the second and third, I express my disapproval of how gangs can influence the actions of individuals.

Part of my response to *Rowanne's Adventures*

Even though she gets one spell wrong, Rowanne seems to me to be an extremely resourceful and spirited lady - the way she decides that 'she would have to travel and have an adventure', for instance, instead of sitting moping because she had made a mistake. Then there is the firm way in which she sends the dwarfs packing and last of all her courageous decision to help the fearful knight, who, as she says, 'Should have tried' to save his lady in the first place. I can understand why Balard was pleased to have her back and I think she fully deserves to be made a king's wizard - or sorceress.

Part of my response to *Personalities*

I have to say, that at the end of *Personalities*, my first reaction is 'Who would want to be like that crowd of yobboes anyway?" I know that there is quite a bit of reasonably good-natured larking about, but Andy's treatment of 'the fat boy' amounts to real bullying! If someone is scared enough to wet their pants, I don't find that the least bit amusing...

Part of my response to *The Gang*

I can easily imagine the mixture of feelings that you experience as the 'anti-hero' in this story. Initially, your disapproval of the gang and their initiation rites, then your decision to join because anything is better than being left out.
The switch in your feelings from fear before the initials are cut into your skin, to pride once the ordeal is over is very realistic. Now you are as irresponsible and as anti-social as the rest of them, and prove it by accepting the dare to throw eggs at a policeman.
Again the change in your feelings from dare devil to frightened teenager, as you listen to the police sirens and next day see the wanted notice in the shop and the policeman at your door, is very convincing. I think he dealt with you very leniently!
I wonder in my mind, whether you will stick with the gang and continue to behave in a reckless and foolhardy way,because you just can't resist the need for their company.

Here, I am, of course, conveniently addressing myself to the 'you' of the story. It is not Russell's behaviour that I am criticising but that of the character he has created. Similarly, his teacher wrote:

I like the way that you trace your feelings - not wanting to join at first, then changing your mind and feeling "really big" when you had joined; then fear and shock when

you saw your picture; then at the end feeling you had been very silly.

In his own response to the story, Russell wrote:

I think in one way it's pretty funny. You could take it that way and another way is it could be very serious because you could get told off very bad. ... There are better people out there than them losers.

Ideating - or visual imaging

But to return from what has become something of a digression into personal and social education, to another aspect of the 'virtual reality' that stories can evoke. In the previous chapter I refer in some detail to Iser's concept of ideation and to how he describes the flow of images which pass through the reader's mind as one of the aesthetic processes which 'set the work in motion'. My Guidelines specifically draw attention to this act of visualising.

Yet when I look through the responses that the teachers made, there is only a scattering of passing references to visual impressions. Does this indicate that the stories to which they were responding were incapable of evoking such images - the mental phantasmagoria that Benton and Fox [1985] refer to as the 'substance' of the story world?

Looking back to the pupils' responses to *The Knight and the Mushroom*, and looking ahead to the Y6 responses to Beowulf's fight beneath the lake or to the Y8 responses to *Ice,* I can say that many pupils made extended visual contributions to the stories which they read.

So why not teachers? I can only hypothesise that teachers are not in the habit of slowing down sufficiently when they are reading through a batch of

pupils' stories to become more fully aware of the image sequencing that is - or could be - taking place as they read. Interestingly, it is an aspect of aesthetic reading which is rarely, if ever, mentioned in the Performance Criteria for either reading or writing stories, at all levels, including GCSE.

When I worked as an Adviser, I spent a great deal of time in many classrooms encouraging children to 'picture think' in their minds, both as readers and as writers, as I describe in *Making Sense, Shaping Meaning.* [pp. 37-38] I had no problem, therefore, as I read the research stories, in envisaging particular scenes quite vividly as the two following examples illustrate. Such pictures uniquely colour many of the stories for me still.

Part of my response to *Rowanne's Adventures*

There are several moments in the story which I can picture like coloured illustrations. Rowanne in the black-beamed laboratory, peering at the huge and ancient book of spells, her long blond hair falling over her shoulders. Rowanne setting off on her adventure on her white mare, looking into the distance at the road that winds out of sight. Rowanne towering over the thieving dwarfs, with her arm raised and her finger pointing, as she is telling them to begone! Rowanne, sitting down close to the knight in rusty armour, her mare cropping the grass nearby - there are dark, threatening clouds and the tree branches are blowing about. Then the two dragons, their front talons raised heraldically as they are poised to pounce on each other, the one scarlet the other green and gold.

Part of my response to *The Deceiver*

There are certain moments in the story that I can picture quite clearly: when Francis is standing below the ridge of rock at the back of the cave, for instance, preparing to leave in the row boat, through the opening that leads to the sea - with the stalactites dripping overhead. I can

also picture the cellar, stacked with casks of whisky, in which the final killing takes place, with the rickety staircase and its two broken steps and a crumpled body at its base.
I find the contrast between the darkness and the light very striking through the whole tale: the dark, narrow alleyways of the small port contrasting with the glare of the mid-day sun on the beach, which also contrasts with the dim light of the cave.

Iser [1978] suggests that:

> 'the actual content of these mental images will be coloured by the reader's existing stock of experience, which acts as a referential background against which the unfamiliar can be conceived and processed.' [p.38]

In the two examples that I have just given, as I move between the words and the space between the words, I can trace how some of these images drew upon my own 'exisiting stock of experience' at both first and second hand. I am conscious for instance that a *Book of Ballads* which I have treasured since childhood, contains highly coloured illustrations in medieval style which indirectly influenced the pictures that I was framing in my mind as I contemplated *Rowanne's Adventures*. The images which I formed more impressionistically for *The Deceiver*, came from many sea-side holidays with my family on Cornish beaches and in the steep streets of fishing villages. It is this mingling of my life with the life of the story which provides the unique attributes which are my 'virtual text'.

Thus in three important respects I would claim that the responses which the teachers and I made to the pupils' stories indicate that we were indeed able to evoke our own virtual texts: through ***personal variations*** in our responses, through ***our interpretations*** in relation to the values we hold

in the real world, and for me in particular, through ***visualising*** .

Question 2

Are the constructions of these simpler narratives sufficiently comparable to those of more experienced authors, to activate an aesthetic transaction between text and reader?

This question is, of course, closely inter-related with the first and in one respect I have already answered it. If our responses to these stories indicate that we were indeed able to create our own virtual texts, then an aesthetic transaction has taken place in which, as Iser puts it, the textual structure enabled such a structural act to occur.

I now want to examine in more detail, however, some aspects of textual structure which these stories written by children, share with more complex literary texts. I believe that they can be shown as Britton [1993] suggests, to have 'an inbuilt direction' which indicates a potential, - to be 'artlike', even if they are not as yet fully fledged works of art.

Opening verbal cues

Rosenblatt [1985] remarks that:

> 'Drawing on past experience, the reader must also sense some organizing principle or framework suggested *by the opening verbal cues*. This will guide interpretation and organization of further cues as the text unrolls.'
>
> [my italics] [p.297]

I have taken this to refer to pointers in the first paragraph or so, that what the reader is engaging with suggests a particular genre. In returning to my data collection to look carefully at these openings, several functional cues for

signalling that *what we are to expect is a story*, have emerged. Intriguingly, most clear opening cues came from the primary children's stories. Although there were also examples from some of the secondary pupils' stories, mostly they took longer to set the scene, where younger children plunged straight in!

Entering a story world

Tom went to the beach for his holiday and was walking around. He sat down on a hill of sand and it fell down. There was a castle and Tom went closer to it.[25]

One sunny day, I was walking along looking forward to going to Portugal tomorrow with my Mum and Dad. I got up early the next morning to catch the ship. We caught the ship just in time.
We were sailing along one minute,then the next I was unconscious. When I first opened my eyes, my eyes felt like lead... [26]

A pivotal moment

One day me and Lora were walking across a field. Suddenly Lora tripped over a stone. Someone walked past us. He or it had a wizard suit on. [11]

"and here is our most valuable piece of science, a time machine." For the first time, Laurie glanced up. He was in the Bristol Science Museum... He had thought it would be so interesting but it had turned out to be as boring as boring can be. But now he'd heard something interesting - a time machine! [27]

Unexpected happenings

At the zoo one day, a man who works there was showing the people all of the animals. As he got to the tiger something serious happened. The tiger jumped over the fence and made

everybody scream... [24]

Jodie went to Bess's house in her red modern convertible. They had a lovely walk up the moor, the breeze blowing their hair back. But when they got to the top, Bess stepped in some blood.[8]

Feelings

It was a hot sunny day. I was bored so I went for a walk. Just then I bumped into my friend, Faye. Faye was bored too, so she came with me. We went to the bridge. I saw a hole under the bridge. Then I looked down the hole. Then a stick went SNAP! and I slipped down the hole, down, down... [7]

It was an early morning at Miami, when the sun was rising onto a great day. Amy Longman stretched her skin into a nice shape and burst her mouth open to breathe out air. She jumped out of bed with a great spring to keep her going for the whole day. Amy was happy. She was usually happy but this time she had added life and she felt that something nice and exciting would happen.[2]

Setting

It was night time in Scotland. On one of the islands in Scotland there is a haunted house. The flowers round it was dead. I always felt as if someone was watching me.[18]

It was a beautiful spring day. Rowanne was busy in Wizard Balard's laboratory. Balard was a skilled wizard and he left Rowanne in charge of everything...[13]

Multiple perspectives and scope for a moving viewpoint

The narrative structure of many of the children's stories is limited in the writing to a single viewpoint - that of the central character who relates the story in the first person or is given the name of the writer, like Dorothy in *Lost*

Underground. While the story is being read for the first time, I find this tends to keep the reader tracked into one 'way of looking', especially as there are no sub-plots. The smaller cast of characters and the absence of more than one narrator limits the scope for the occupation of Iser's 'shifting vantage points' or 'the depiction of reality... through the filter of consciousness of protagonists in the story.' [Bruner, 1986] Mostly, journeys by the youngest children through the stories they write are fairly linear, seen as it were from a single camera angle and with few if any twists to the plot which require a readjustment of our standpoint.

However, three of Iser's 'four main perspectives: those of the narrator, the characters, and plot' [p.35] allow room for movement, even in the simplest stories, especially when a *response* to the initial *act* of reading is under consideration, where the reader can move backwards as well as forwards in her recollections. As our responses to *Tom at Terror Towers* indicated in Chapter 3, we can, for instance, bear in mind the possible anxiety of Tom's mother after her son has run off as well as the excitement of the intrepid adventurer - and thus feel relief when they become friends again, upon his safe return home.

Similarly, in *The Runaway Tiger* we can take into account the tiger's need to escape as well as the keeper's need to have him recaptured as we move from the shocked bystanders as the beast leaps for freedom, to the excitement of the hunters 'swinging their nets' and finally to the humiliation of the tiger as he is dragged back into captivity and the satisfaction of the keeper at his safe return.

Gone!, by Amy [Y8] and *The Picnic* by Nicola [Y10] achieve considerably

greater narrative complexity. Each in a different way enables the reader:

> 'to occupy shifting vantage points... and to fit the diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern' [Iser, 1978]

In Amy's story, *Gone!* the theme of a tribally ritual passage from boyhood to manhood is cruelly transformed by the intervention of destructive forces from another culture which compel the reader to move between the two worlds. As part of my initial response to the story I wrote:

Maybe after the rituals of entering into manhood, setting off on their own in search of the sacred tree was meant to be a challenging experience - intended to include such minor pitfalls as becoming drenched by tropical rain and caked in mud. But for the change from children to young men to be accompanied by two such dreadful experiences as Sarik and Rolak encounter, is almost too painful to contemplate. I imagine that the clearing in which only the stumps of trees are left, and animals dying -maybe from shock or want of nourishment - is something to do with the greedy stripping of the Rain Forests by outsiders who have not grown up there. But I cannot imagine what has happened to the whole tribe. Maybe some of them will have survived from whatever catastrophe befell and will be able to link up with the two boys.

Initially, I am viewing the story from the perspective of the tribe's intentions but I then switch to the unexpected change in perspective from the boys' point of view, on what 'becoming a man' involves, once they are faced with the dead and dying animals and the deserted village. Next, I view the story interpretively from my own perspective as a reader who knows about the destruction of the African Rain Forests - and finally I move to thinking beyond the story to what the consequences might be for the boys and for their tribe.

In *The Picnic* a different jungle world is imposed through the imagination of

the child in the story, upon a rural English wood from which the reader is gradually enabled to perceive that a safe return will be impossible. As part of her response, the teacher wrote:

I can see the family arriving for the picnic and the idyllic setting they have found. Everything is set for a happy peaceful day. I can understand the boy's moving away in boredom, wanting to explore his surroundings. In doing so, he leaves the safety of his family but I don't feel worried - not until his feelings about his surroundings begin to change. He moves from being inside a forest to being inside a jungle. Again, there is nothing worrying about this because it seems to be all part of the adventure.
But the adventure goes sour and he becomes lost and no longer the adventurer but a frightened little boy. The strongest picture for me is the end. This terrible image of the child being sucked under the mud 'ebbing in time with his breathing' compared with the image of his father and brother innocently sleeping on the grass.

Here, the teacher begins by adopting the point of view of the whole family, delighted with their pleasant picnic spot. Her focus then narrows to the young boy's feelings of boredom once all the food has been eaten.
After he has set off into the wood she switches to her own perspective as the reader and to the changes of viewpoint which occur once the child becomes lost and the setting becomes unremittingly hostile. She concludes with her own juxtaposition of the helpless boy's terrible dilemma set against the 'innocently sleeping' father and child - a cruel irony which implies her recollection of everything being set at the start for 'a happy peaceful day'. All these shifts in perspective have taken place under 'the guidance of the text.' [Rosenblatt,1938; Bruner, 1986]]

Gaps in the text, implicit meanings, room for conjecture

Both Iser [1978] and Bruner [1986] emphasise the importance of gaps or blanks in a narrative text, whereby the reader:

> 'is made to supply what is meant from what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning.' [Iser, p.168]

In some respects, very young writers often fulfill this requirement inadvertently rather than by consciously skilled crafting. Their stories, as I observed in Chapter 3, are the 'tip of the iceberg' because they don't have the expertise (or the time) to develop them further. In our responses as *experienced* readers, there are a number of examples which show how the very succinctness of these brief stories, allows us room for conjecture and for demonstrating how we 'make sense' of the gaps as our contribution to the coherence of the story.

In her response to The *Secret of Adventure Island* by Craig, for instance, his teacher writes :

The fact that you make the hero wake up in a jungle without explaining how he got there was interesting, because of course he wouldn't have known either!

I offer a different 'explanation' for the considerable gaps in Craig's narrative:

I find this story very dream-like - so many unexpected things happen in so many different places. The way the hero of the story suddenly finds a stun gun in his hands, for instance, which immediately changes the whole situation - and then the way they all run away without really knowing where. It is all just like a dream!

Teachers following the National Curriculum's emphasis on sequencing,

might take a more negative view of Craig's sudden leaps ('We were sailing along, then the next thing I was unconscious'), urging him to fill in the gaps himself in order to construct a more 'logical discourse'. I would suggest that our responses are more aesthetically and educationally appropriate, as they indicate for the pupil how readers can bridge the gaps in a narrative text in their own imaginations.

To take another example, where both the teacher and I indicate how the lack of explicitness both intrigues and draws us in to *House War Three* by Kris. Andy writes:

I'm kind of puzzled as to how you knew the man was looking round the streets. But him saying 'Why are you so nervous could be taken as an ironic question - the man might have known whose shoulders he grabbed. But it turns out that he didn't know who you were. *It's this uncertainty that interests me because I can interpret these events for myself.*

I write:

I can't definitely decide whether the man really was going to get him a treat this time, as he is on his own and presumably not dressed up as a ghost any more - or whether he'd just gone off to the kitchen to get another bucket of cold water. *It is the fact that I can't be sure that makes the story interesting.*

Stranded, by Sam, a pupil in a Year 8 class, provides an outstanding example of a story deliberately composed in such a way that the reader is driven to conjecture about what exactly is going on. The narrative does not so much unfold as switch from one scenario to another. In my initial response to Sam in which I share my reactions to his story, I offer three different interpretations which I summarise here:

1) Everton is a real person, with a real illness - a brain tumour say, and the last part of the story all happens in his mind...
2)Everton is in fact the addict, who has now become a 'rich bastard' himself. Every section of the story is true, including the final one, where Everton is now the sole surviving human being. He kills himself because he can't face the thought.
3) From the moment when the 'I' character blacks out in the alleyway, everything else happens in his drugged mind, right to the end, where he dies in the alley...
Personally, this is my favourite interpretation because I feel that the opening sequence is so important and must have some significance. I kept coming back to it in my mind, all the time I was reading the rest of the story.

As it turned out, Sam's way of looking at what was happening in his story was different again - starting in the present, moving into a drug induced coma but continuing to a future that really happened. I am not worried about failing to arrive at the 'right answer'. Along with Wilson [1966], Holland [1975] and Bleich [1980] I prefer to draw the pupil's attention to the possibilities of variant interpretations of the same text. Skilled story writers choose to write ambivalently.

Then there are the descriptive passages in many of the stories, which at the same time leave room for the reader's imagination to:

> 'attempt to ideate that which one can never see as such.'
>
> [Iser, 1978]

I recall how Laura, one of the pupils who responded to *The Knight and the Mushroom*, commented approvingly:

I love the descriptions. They are to the point and they *don't go on for ever*, explaining and describing every point.[my italics]

Certainly cues or clues for our imaginations to work on need to be given if we are to form our own pictures of places or of people but I now realise that it would be impossible fully to represent a story's visual aspects in words by 'adding more description'.

Here are just two examples from the pupils' stories of how they have provided sufficient information for readers to fill in the gaps for themselves as they create their own virtual text:

Dad the droop of the family, spent all day in a chair, with his eyes glued to a portrait of his father which hung above the fireplace. Dad also had this big frown on his face - all the time, it was there. Even when they were happy, he'd be the opposite of smiling. The frown stuck to him like an insect sticks to sap.[30]

It was a mysterious place. People were not brave enough to look at it. It was a tall black shadow looming over an empty garden... It was an ancient building that was crumbling and decaying....
He decided to go in. When he got in, he sat on one of the old benches. His arms were aching and they felt as if they'd drop off at any minute. It was then that he noticed the atmosphere inside the church. It was cold and damp and Steve heard the slow drip drip of water, probably from the thunderstorm the night before. The bench he was sitting on was stone cold and hard. He then noticed that a five pound note had come out of his pocket and fallen onto the floor so he knelt down and picked it up.. He just happened to look under the bench.
What he saw next was something that made his blood run cold. Underneath the bench was a dead body. He froze. The body looked quite fresh.[1]

It is easy to see how there is scope for readers to contribute many additional

details to those provided by the text if they are to evoke their own versions of what 'Dad' looked like in the first instance, or the exterior and interior of the church in the second - not to mention the dead body! For me, Duncan's description of 'Dad' calls to mind Anthony Browne's illustrations for the ground down figure of Hansel and Gretel's father and the 'tall black shadow' of the sinister church reminds me of childhood visits to the blackened ruins of Kirkstall Abbey near Leeds.

Summary

In response, then, to my second question, there are several respects in which the construction of the pupils' narratives are sufficiently comparable to those of more experienced authors for an aesthetic transaction to be made by readers who are prepared to take an aesthetic stance. They provide opening cues which indicate that a story is about to happen; though simple, they offer readers movement through the narrative from more than one perspective; there are ample opportunities for reading between the lines.

Appreciating the writer's achievements.

So far in this chapter, I have principally considered the ways in which pupils' stories have shown themselves to be capable of evoking an **engaged** response. In relation to reader-response theories, I have shown how readers can construct a virtual text from both simple and more complex children's stories and how features of narrative discourse which make such a construct possible, are sufficiently present to evoke an aesthetic transaction.

I now want to consider the second kind of response offered in my Guidelines, in which the reader's attention focuses on an appreciation of the pupil writer's achievements in handling narrative discourse.

Question 3

This leads me to my third question, relating to *the classroom context* in which pupils write stories and teachers respond:

Is this personal contact with the writer a factor in enabling our appreciative responses to retain an engaged or aesthetic stance?

I have explained how I came to realise 'that in focusing on aspects of how the writer had succeeded in handling the narrative, it was essential if the response was to retain its meaningfulness, for the reader not to lose sight of *her own experience* of the story but here, I want to focus on the teacher's *knowledge of the pupil* who wrote the story. In making an engaged response, the teachers were recollecting *the story* in order to share with the pupil their version or virtual text. In making an appreciative response, they were often clearly recollecting *the writer* in the mind's eye, whose efforts in producing the story had been followed with close attention, as Kate and Andy both describe in their conversations with me in Chapter 7.

Thus there is a strong sense of audience about these appreciations which corresponds to that defined by Britton and his team [1975] as '**pupil to teacher, particular relationship**':

> 'This category... is therefore, like 2.1, "child to trusted adult", a *personal* relationship, but also, unlike 2.1, *a professional* relationship based upon shared interest and expertise, and an accumulating shared context.'
>
> [my italics] [p.69]

I suggest that the appreciations elicited by my Guidelines convey a similar

***'teacher to pupil*, particular relationship'** which is also both personal and professional. There is a directness about them which fully acknowledges the pupil as the successful author of the story as the following responses demonstrate. At the same time, the respondents are professionally careful, not merely to enthuse but to relate their comments to the effect that the story had on them in the way the narrative was handled:

I very much like the way that you keep your reader in mind when you start your story. I felt as if you were talking to me personally as I was reading it.[3]

I am most impressed by the care you have taken to make all the details in your story consistent. The fact that the Hodgsons are too poor for instance, and have to watch the lottery at the local pub... [30]

There's a directness about this story that I like. I can hear your voice as I read. There's a cheekiness about it that makes it lively.[6]

I was very taken with this story, Ben. It reminded me strongly of *Treasure Island* - one of my favourites. Have you read it? I visualised the scenes in the pub and in the harbour like the King Street/Welsh Back area in Bristol. Do you know it? It's supposed to be where Stephenson set Long John Silver's pub in *Treasure Island*.[16]

Well, Jo, I'm not surprised you were shocked. I found it really spooky just reading about it. When you got as far as hearing chains and then footsteps, I felt quite tense... When you got to the bridge you start to bring in some very good detail - the cold night, getting petrol, where you parked... [21]

Yours is a fascinating story Sam. Whilst in one way it is very clear to follow, in another it is very complex. I felt

that the incident in the alley was in the past and a flashback - and the largest section of the story was in the now - and that puts the section with the robot in the future... However, once you explained your thinking, it was also just as logical. You put the opening in the present and it puts Everton into a drug induced coma. ...
It reminds me of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* - reality stood on its head.
I love Everton as a character. He is larger than life: 'dipped his large hand into the bowl of strawberries". Everything he does seems to reflect confidence and a rich life style.[14]

I like the clarity of the writing, the care you've taken over the sequence of events and descriptions. The frustrations of the characters are expressed in the things they say and do - "No they can't!" or Mum slamming the door in Mr Jones' face. The dialogue moves the action forward too, - where Bobby shouts, for instance, and Mr Jones lashes out with his walking stick. This leads to the sign being dumped in the hedge, which in turn, leads to Mr Jones showing his frustrations/worries about not selling his house.[5]

Summary

I have chosen these excerpts from our Appreciations because they demonstrate how the teachers have individual pupils in mind, to whom they respond directly, person to person; how they have what they themselves have 'made' of each story also in mind; and how they can inter-relate their experience of the story and their experience of the pupil in a way which retains an aesthetic stance which is personally meaningful for both readers and writers.

Question 4

And now I come to my fourth and final question:

Do our responses as experienced readers provide potentially useful feedback for pupils - as story writers and as story readers?

The answer to this question must rely, in part, on the answers that I have given in this chapter to the three previous questions. Here is a final summary, therefore, of the insights that we were offering about their stories from an internalised perspective, along with my reasons for believing that such responses can have educational value.

Through our engaged responses:

* *We were able to show how different aspects of the same story could be highlighted through the virtual texts of different readers, indicating how 'multi-layered' the meaning in stories can be.*

In this way pupils can be shown how their stories, like those of professional authors, can be open to diverse interpretations.

* *We were able to raise ethical issues in our interpretive comments relating to the behaviour of the characters.*

In this way pupils can be shown how thoughtful readers (and writers) relate what happens in stories to the moral values which they hold in real life. Stories (including their own) can offer more food for thought than mere escapism into a fantasy world.

* *We were able to show how experienced readers can move around a story as they consider what happens from more than one viewpoint.*

In this way we were indicating how readers can make use of different perspectives to explore a story's meaning.

**We were able to show how readers seek to give coherence to their virtual texts, filling in some of the gaps by offering their own explanations for what occurred.*

In this way we were indicating how a reader's active contribution plays an important part in her transaction with a story text.

** We were able to show how readers can use 'their existing stock of experience' to evoke mental images from cues provided in the text.*

In this way we were indicating how writers can provide such cues and how readers can make the most of them to create the substance of that 'secondary world' which the stories have evoked.

Through our appreciative responses

** We were able to speak directly to the individual writers who had produced their own stories.*

In this way we were acknowledging their authorship.

** We were able to comment explicitly on how their handling of the narrative had enabled us to recreate their stories.*

In this way we were able to show how techniques such as sequence, structure and pace, dialogue and carefully chosen details can, quite specifically, affect the reader's involvement with the story and can be related to it.

** By restricting ourselves to commenting on achievements rather than shortcomings we were able to offer a genuine appreciation.*

Wilson [1966] comments that:

> 'College students are usually more personally involved in a novel before they try to analyze it: their involvement seems to fade when they get down to serious analysis.'
>
> [p.40]

As more experienced readers, we were able to retain our engagement whilst commenting explicitly on the pupils' achievements in handling the narrative. In explaining directly to each of them how the way they wrote the story affected what we 'made' of it, we show *how it is possible to comment on the construction of a story without sacrificing our aesthetic stance.* We are according pupils genuine respect by recognising their success as a writers. How we experienced their stories is a mark of their achievement!

Chapter Eleven

Moving further afield

When I embarked on my research, nothing, as far as I could ascertain, had been written about how *teachers* might be expected to respond in writing (other than evaluatively) to *stories written by their pupils.* This left me free to explore my favoured 'personally meaningful' perspective without reference to other suggested approaches as to how teachers might respond to their pupils' completed stories *as story readers.*

However, a great deal has been written about how *pupils* can be expected or encouraged to respond to what they read. I knew that if I was to make a strong case, therefore, for teachers to encourage pupils to take an aesthetic stance to their story reading, I would need to take into account other approaches to reading which are currently being advocated for English teaching.

I have to admit, as part of my personal story in undertaking this investigation, that one of my reasons for confining my first excursion to the field of reader-response theory was because I felt vulnerable about the post-modernist dismissiveness of those, like Eagleton [1983], who believe that to find personal meaning in literature no longer has any academic credibility. I had a sense of discomfort, that in attributing both aesthetic and educational value to such responses, I might , in my own sixties, appear to be stuck in the 1960s!

However, there was no putting it off any longer, so this is my account of how I moved further afield, in order to take a closer look at the kind of approaches to the study of literature that were being recommended to English teachers

through their national journal and elsewhere. These relate in the main to the ***cultural factors*** and the ***narrative codes*** which influence the way writers write and readers read, and also to the ***relationship of verbal texts to visual ones.*** I could not ignore the fact, that as far as pupils are concerned, there are these other ways of looking at texts, which might call into question the primacy of those individual, experiential, aesthetic 'transactions' which I regard as an essential part of the story reading process.

First, let me recreate and reflect further on a conversation that I had with Alastair West who was generous enough to agree to talk to me about the changes which he had made in his own views about the teaching of literature. Prior to our conversation, he had forwarded to me a lengthy chapter from his own doctoral [unpublished] dissertation, in which these changes are described:

> '...the story that literature promotes moral and emotional education has fulfilled a key ideological function for teachers at least as much as for their students. This chapter examines that story and argues both its theoretical inadequacy and socio-political undesirability.'

I was aware, therefore, that our views would differ and I looked forward to an exploration of our differences.

I should add that I have known Alastair professionally, since we met in the early eighties when he was Head of English at one of the Wiltshire schools for which I was the English Adviser. At the time we had this more recent meeting, Alastair was the English Adviser for Redbridge and Chair of the National Association for the Teaching of English.

As I reflect, now, on our lunchtime conversation, I can see how the different angles that we were coming from caused us to run our ideas alongside each other, occasionally converging, but more often sidestepping the point of divergence. As the talk carried us forwards, we did not, in fact, seek to resolve our differences so much as make them evident but as Winter [1989] remarks:

> 'Dialectics is a method of analysis which...helps us to decide what is significant.' [p.46]

Excerpts from the transcript will serve, therefore, as a helpful illustration of a particular moment in my own research story, when key issues were raised to which I would need to pay further attention, as I proceeded with my investigation.

I have numbered each of our comments and typed key statements in bold for ease of reference in the commentary which follows. I have not, on the whole, drawn attention to comments where we are in agreement, focusing rather, for the purposes of this chapter, on examples where our approaches diverge, with regard to what matters when pupils read literary texts.

Excerpts from my conversation with Alastair West about 'meaning' in stories

[1] A - You take kids seriously...
[[2] P - And ***you take their stories seriously****?*
[3] A - Absolutely! Of course! But I mean ***you take them seriously as learners****. In [some schools] it seemed to me they didn't take kids seriously - either their responses or their outputs or the process they were engaged in... There might be differences, but the essential thing, what they are engaged in, is something you take seriously at the kind of highest intellectual level.*
[4]P - And you give it thoughtful attention for what it is.

[5] A - Not for what it isn't, no! Exactly.
[6] P - Because I mean I think there's a lot of pressure to look at what isn't there, what could be improved.
[7] A - I would do that, but from quite a different viewpoint, in terms of absences from the text - but that's actually taking the work seriously.
[8] P - There's also 'potential' meaning in a way - what's in their heads but not on the paper is also part of the absences in the text.
[9] A - Yes it is. As I read [your paper] that seemed to be a different route...

*****

[10] P - To what extent would you feel that it's incredibly old-fashioned to make the assumption that you can address yourself to the meaning - to what stories are about? [P mentions Barthes]
[11] A - I think he would be useful to you because when you're saying that Fiona and you responded differently to the same textual features - one of you was interested in character and one of you was interested in plot - one of Barthes' things is that texts have a range of codes, one of which is to do with plot, one of which is to do with cultural reference, one of which is to do with characters and so on. ***What I understood by what you were describing was the way that any reader can pick up the potentiality of meaning in those markers...***
[12] P - Even though you're not aware that those are the markers you're picking up?
[13] A - ***You see, I would want teachers to explore with kids how it was that you two read the same signs differently ... and what it is in the text that makes it possible to draw different conclusions, what the different conclusions are and what's the difference at stake between the conclusions.***

*****

[14] P - What about people that you didn't mention in your chapter [about literary theory] such as Bruner - he's been someone who's made a lot of sense to me, because he seems to be thinking along the same lines as Rosenblatt was - ***in terms of readers constructing a virtual text - and it may be different every time they read something from the previous time...***

*****

[15] P - ***I found myself disagreeing far more profoundly with the***

notion that language is a kind of cage and we don't even know what we're saying! *[P refers to Lacan] Wouldn't you agree that the flow of language is representing some kind of experience for the speaker or the writer?*

[16] A - ***I'm just extremely suspicious of 'authenticity' and I don't think we do know all about everything we say.***

[17] P - ***Psychologically****, as well as culturally and linguistically there are tacit meanings that surface...*

[18] A - ***Yes, but there are all sorts of things that are ideological*** *- a lot of which you don't see.*

[19] P - How do you define ideology Alastair?

[20] A - Unspoken assumptions about the way the world is - what's taken for granted. ***My idea of ideology is that it's inescapable and you're involved in it. You can't do anything about it but you can be more or less aware of the constraints it imposes.***

*****

Back to Lacan

[21] P - The notion that you don't think language, language thinks you - I would agree that language filters the way in which we perceive the world and the way in which we experience it, but he seemed to be suggesting that...

[22] A - It's more than that...

[23] P - ***If we're talking about mind, and meaning and perception, I have my strongest reservations about being tied so closely to a cultural view of language governing us rather than us making use of language.*** *The 'press of meaning', the motivation to make meaning...*

[24] A - I don't find a conflict there - the fact that we are meaning-making creatures and that when we're engaging with the world, that's ultimately what we're trying to do, to try to make some meaningful sense of the stuff around us and the relationships around us - ***I don't have any problem with that at all. All that Lacan was saying, is that language isn't simply something that you pick up and use, it's something into which you are positioned. You're born into it - you're inserted into it from the very earliest moment. I don't take that to be determinist, but it's determining to some degree because all of those language relationships and significance pre-exist you. They both enable and constrain you, but they're not neutral.***

[25] P - So language is enabling as well as being a constraint?

[26] A - Absolutely. [A now refers to a professor of Sociology at Cambridge whose views in this respect he found exciting] One of the things that Giddens talks about - he argues what seemed to me to be a fairly sensible position, a really good argument in which the main conclusion is that any action has a kind of duality and we won't actually get anywhere unless we accept that. Any action both constrains and enables. Any position you're in both confines and enables you - and I just found that wonderfully eloquent because it seemed to me that teachers are endlessly mis-reading either how much or how little they have to change.

[27] P - I'd agree with that but as a paradox rather than a dichotomy.

[28] A - ***So I see Lacan as being similar to Giddens, in what he's saying about language - that it's existing there already before you are even thought of. There's a whole range of meanings that are intrinsically there. That's what you've got to manipulate and do something with.***

[29] P - So if you're talking about the individual, rather than the individual being totally constrained by the culture into which they are born... ***I think I would have reservations about a view that said there are only a certain number of patterns that we can operate within. There's a kind of 'things being various', a richness about individual perceptions which doesn't mean to say that one is claiming an autonomy for them - or a special authenticity...***

[A agrees that individual differences should be recognised but...]

[30] A - ***I'd want to explore those differences but actually I'd want to make it clear that in our society some, such as National Front stickers, are unacceptable. That's an area where historically, I think there's been too much focus on the individual within English teaching, and I would want to emphasise much more the social, so that in terms of exploring differences, I'd want to look at why it was, for example, that some texts were privileged by some groups, whether we're talking about the Koran or the Bible or Shakespeare or My Mate Shofik or the Beano. I don't think we've done enough work on that - to explore what's at stake in those valuations. I'm not saying that your individual reader responses***

are something in the past... I just feel there's been an over-emphasis on the individual and I would want, as it were, to put that on hold. *So that all kinds of the conversations you're talking about in your Paper, I would want to see going on, but I also would want to see something else.*

[31] P - We're thinking particularly here of ***the stories that children write.*** *What something else would you want to bring to their stories?*

[32] A - ***I'd want to explore with them what it was that made them make the choices they did.***

[33] P - I'm not sure they could answer that - I'm not sure I could answer that. ... I don't think you know what gives rise to your responses at the point at which you're making them. Wasn't it Bleich who said first of all you had a response to a text and then you interpreted your response. That rang a bell for me because that seems to be what I'm trying to do with these teacher responses and with the older children it would be with pupils' responses as well. ***But I would also want to acknowledge that we don't really know fully why we make the responses we do.***

[34] A - No, I think that's right, but I think it's often easier to explore those ***'What's at stake?" in the choices that have been made*** *when you're looking at other people's responses.*

[A.tells the Tebbitt anecdote, which happened at the time of the riots on the Broadwater Farm Estate in Tottenham]

I was driving to my next appointment and I heard Tebbit talking on the radio about how much of all this was attributable to poor discipline within the home and school and the absence of proper exams and not being instructed in Standard English. OK? ***Now, as a text, I think that's an interesting choice to look at, to think about what frames of reference have led this guy to make that kind of interpretation of these events.*** *And because of its outrageousness - what he's doing as a 'reader' is very clearly related to a whole range of other things.* ***Now that is what I would like kids to be engaged in.***

*****

[35] A - I'm confident that kids can, with prompting, ***think critically.***

[36] P - And by 'critically' you don't mean 'How I could have done it better" necessarily, although that might be part of it?

[37]A - ***I would always say 'How would it be different?' rather than better.***

[38] P - But exploring what's actually there, really has taught me that ***if you pay really careful attention to what is actually there***, what has arrived - there's far more than meets the eye.

[39] A - I agree, but ***I think it helps to discover what's there, to contemplate what it would look like differently. My motive in saying "***

'How would it be different if ?' is to help kids to discover why it's as it is - not 'they should have done it differently'.

*****

[40] A - It's very easy to give kids the wrong impression, that you're dissatisfied. You see when I said that I think the response should be at the highest intellectual level, I'm suggesting to teachers that they need to talk about the stuff in adult terms, in so far as that is possible. It's no use simply saying 'This is good' or 'I really enjoyed this', they've actually got to say what they like about it.

[41] P - Specifically.

[42] A - Specifically, yes.

[43] P - ***What started me of on all this - they [teachers] were not responding in any way to what any one story was about. And that uniqueness doesn't mean that there is only one meaning to the story.***

[44] A - It struck me, that if you were doing your job, marking and responding to a piece of kid's work, you were a) able to write something sensible about it, at a technical level as a writer - something about characterisation or plot, something you could actually say was worth commenting on - and secondly, you ought to be able to direct them to something else to read which was either somebody doing the same thing better, or approaching the same problem differently...

[45] P - ***But you see what you haven't included there is 'What actually went on inside my head?' - not as a teacher concerned about your progress, but as a reader of your story.***

[46] A - But for me, much of ***that would happen from the middle onwards of the composition period. That would be the point at which you were engaging with the substance of the story,*** and having the kind of conversations as to how it connected to your experience...

[47] P - Once they've finished, isn't the final article they've produced worth giving thoughtful attention to as a finished product?

*****

[48] P - Would you still feel that giving kids a chance to write a complete story is important?

[49] A - Yes, for all sorts of reasons. In terms of exploration of their experience and discovery of language, the sense of shaping something artistically - reworking experience I suppose and the kind of understanding that comes from that.

[50] P - ***So you really do believe that writing stories does incorporate individual experience?***

[51] A - I can put that two ways you see. I can talk ***in those cosy terms*** *that you'll recognise and that I'm used to, and which I used to believe in utterly.* ***Then I could put it another way in terms of 'These are the counters of our culture; these are the genres that kids need to be familiar with. They have to be able to have command and control and be aware of the kind of meanings that have accreted through other people's use of them. And in order to be able to do that, they have to be able to do them themselves.***

*****

[52] A - ***I would want to problematise narrative more now I think.*** *I mean I used to think that it was the best and the only kind of writing that was really worth bothering with.*

[53] P - You mean literary narrative?

[54] A - ***I'd want to do a lot more non-literary stuff*** *- and I would want to do a lot more narrative in other curriculum areas* ***and push kids to realising that narrative was one of the ways of organising the world and it didn't simply occur in fiction.***

*****

Visual texts

[55] A - You see I'm not sure, for example, how I feel about why we're so hung up about language. I wish I saw a great deal more work exploring visual narrative. Would I care, if up and down the country, instead of those old CSE folders, with a few poems and mostly narratives and one discursive piece - if instead of that it was predominantly visual? ...

I think in some ways I put to one side the anxieties I've got about written verbal narrative... I think it should happen but I'm much more concerned that other media that seem to me quite crucial are simply not there to the extent they should be.... *It just seems to me, that the culture we now have - when we're talking about verbal narrative, we're actually looking at a relatively minority form - and that's not to say it's not valued but somehow we have side-stepped the main medium of our age.*

[56] P - You talked about 'a work of art' earlier, yet you seem to dismiss verbal art as a form - ***would you say there is no such thing as an aesthetic composition?***

[57] A - ***Well I think it's a good question you see, and I think that kind of question is what an English curriculum ought to comprise, rather than assume that there are.***

[58] P - ***How would you define an aesthetic text or an aesthetic experience?***

[59] A - With difficulty! You see I think what happens when you've got something like soap opera alongside say, serial 19th century fiction, Neighbours against Jane Austen or East Enders against one of the Dickens serial novels, there seem to me to be a lot of interesting similarities that you can point to, which kids I think need to know about. What little research there is about real responders suggests that people actually respond to East Enders in much the same way they do to Dickens or Jane Austen or whatever.

[60] P - But the distinctions that Rosenblatt makes, for instance, between efferent readings of text for information retrieval and ***aesthetic readings of text for personal exploration*** *- would you still regard that as being a valid distinction?*

[61] A - Possibly, I don't know, I'm not sure on that.

*****

[62] P - So to come back to children, whatever kind of text they produce (literary or non-literary) according to the invitations they've been given, would you agree that they deserve your felt response to that text as well as an analytic, teacherly one?

[63] A - Not if it's a kind of stick and cut and paste of other people's words.

[64] P - Well that's a kind of dummy run...

[65] A - But as soon as a kid is doing something that is voiced, in your terms, you

take it seriously.
[66] P - But you make a response to it which is not just 'teacherly' in the sense of being critical?
[67] A - No.
[68] P - ***You let them know which bits interested and excited you...***
[69] A - ***and which bits are well done and why you think its well done...***
[70] P - And why do you think it's important to do that?
[71] A - Because they're learning to use language to create effects upon audiences [and] in order to do that, ***they need detailed feedback about the actuality of the real response.***

*****

My values

[72] P - Again, you see, I think meaning-making - the way we find significance, and how we dynamically change our views about the world, is for me what is at the heart of education. It is encouraging children to become more confident and more aware of how they can do that.
[73] A - I'd want to start - ***I think probably the difference [between us] is the extent to which you would explore the social - the business of the individual and the social. I'd want to emphasise the individual making of meaning but I would not want to give the impression that the fact that it seemed to be an individual authentic voice therefore gave it a kind of unchallengeable authority. If I think of English teaching, I think on the whole, that's what it does do, and it doesn't take the next step of well... have a look at that authenticity as an expression of the particular group of which you form a part, either as an adolescent girl, Asian kid in East London or whatever - and how it might look to other groups.***
[74] P - ***Well how would you do that for Y3/4 children's stories?***
[75] A - I think some things you could do actually. ***I think you can say to kids reading their own or someone else's story, not just 'What do you think of it?' but 'What would your Mum make of it?' That seems to me a perfectly reasonable question - 'What would your Gran make of it?' - or 'Think of somebody who comes from a different kind of household to yours - 'What would they make of the story?' That***

seems to me to open up the possibility of setting their 'authenticity' in a social context.

Commentary

Teacher responses

Where my research has focused centrally on the uniqueness of what a teacher makes of a pupil's story, aesthetically, Alastair is more inclined to focus the teacher's attention on writing 'something sensible at the technical level... something worth commenting on.' He regards 'engaging with the substance of the story' as more appropriate at the drafting and re-drafting stage, while the story is evolving and the teacher is operating 'live' in the classroom. As I have noted previously, this is a view which both primary and secondary teachers have expressed during the course of the enquiry. But what is the point of suggesting that what writers and readers make of stories matters, if it is then ignored once a story is complete and ready for consumption?

Taking a ***social*** focus

Throughout our conversation, Alastair's comments tend to focus on evidence of what can be deduced about *social context* from the texts pupils read, while I want to look inwards for evidence of the individual reader's *virtual text.* Where I am interested in individual variations for what they tell us about how the reader looked into the story, he is interested in the cultural reasons for the choices readers make:

What would your Mum make of it? Think of someone who comes from a different kind of household to yours... [75]

From the start, he is more interested in 'what's the difference at stake' [13] between the different conclusions about a story that different readers draw.

Individuality

I have strong reservations about becoming little more than a mouthpiece for language with its lengthy history of multitudinous other mouths. I want to assert the personal nature of each individual's use of language, not regardless of the cultural nuances, but at least putting them on the back burner, for attention later. [15] [17] [23]

Alastair is wary of what he refers to as *'authenticity'* [16] and later as what might *seem* to be *'an individual authentic voice'*. Not to recognise *'that authenticity as an expression of the particular group of which you form a part'* is to confer *'a kind of unchallengeable authority'* upon it which he cannot accept.

At this point in investigation, I had not read the work of Stanley Fish [1980]. Now, I am more aware how the various 'interpretive communities' to which we belong will undoubtedly influence both what we see and the way we see it. Yet having acknowledged that to be so, here are Alastair and myself, both operating with a learner-centred model of teaching (we are both happy to agree that pupils and their work, and their responses should be taken seriously [1] [3] [4]), both with experience of English teaching in the seventies and advisory work in the eighties, both involved members of our National Association, and yet we are clearly not seeing eye to eye about what matters most in reader response. Though part of the same interpretive community, nevertheless, we still make our own *individual* interpretations.

Values

Where I focus on children as individual meaning-makers [72] and still retain a 'personal growth' model of learning, Alastair wants pupils to become more

aware of, and consequently more critical of the cultural ideologies to do with gender and race as well as language, through which we perceive ourselves and our world. [20] The more we understand, the more we can manipulate rather than be manipulated. [28] [51]He is not totally opposed to 'the individual making of meaning' [73] but he believes that *'there's been too much focus on the individual within English teaching.'* [30]

Extending our definition of 'narrative texts'

On several occasions in our conversation, Alastair talks about an opening up of the way we look at texts. He wants to extend an understanding of narrative texts in several ways.

Firstly, he wants to break through the boundaries of narrative as fiction:

I'd want to do a lot more narrative in other curriculum areas and push kids to realising that narrative was one of the ways of organising the world. [54]

Secondly, he wants to focus attention on *oral* texts - on what people say and what they 'read into' situations. His anecdote about listening to Norman Tebbit sounding off on his car radio is a telling one! [34]

Finally, he is keen to recognise the increasing part that visual texts of all kinds play in Western (and maybe world) culture:

I think in some ways I put to one side the anxieties I've got about verbal narrative... I think it should happen but I'm much more concerned that other media that seem to me quite crucial are simply not there to the extent they should be... somehow we've side-stepped the main medium of our age. [55]

Approaching texts as cultural constructs

Reading Stories [1987], Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson

Studying Literature [1990], Brian Moon

Reading Fictions, [1991], Mellor, O'Neill, Patterson

I next want to consider three books designed for use in secondary classrooms, published in Australia by authors from the Chalkface Press. All three are currently available from the National Association for the Teaching of English in this country and are highly recommended in the Association's publications booklet. All three focus on cultural analysis or 'deconstruction' as a preferred mode of response to literature:

> 'A concern that is central to our approach... is our focus on the representation of gender, class and race in literary texts.' [Mellor et al, 1987, p.1]

> 'In this model, "literary" texts and their meanings are a result of cultural production.' [Moon, 1990, p.53]

> '... we argue that there are dominant readings [of texts]. These are sets of meanings which certain groups in a society agree about. Other readings which disagree with the dominant readings of texts are described as alternative or resistant readings.' [Mellor et al, 1991, p.4]

The emphasis throughout, is on 'readings' rather than 'readers':

> 'We are not arguing here simply for a plurality of readings or interpretations based on the personal experience of readers. Rather we hope students will be encouraged to:
> analyse how they produce particular readings;
> consider what is at stake in the differences;
> ask on whose behalf particular readings are made.'
> [1991, p.96]

Once again, though in a different way from the approaches advocated earlier this century by the New Criticism, the story text is to be regarded as an object for analysis, to which the reader must on no account subject

herself. Texts are culturally manipulative and their authority must be challenged, especially as:

> 'The ideas of dominant groups tend to be emphasised or foregrounded... while those of less powerful groups tend to be suppressed.' [1990, p.53]

Stibbs [TES,1993] comments that *Reading Fictions*

> 'Encourages young readers to heckle texts knowingly...'.

The central question that all three booklets pose for the reader is 'What's going on here?', not aesthetic questions such as 'How do I imagine it?' or 'How did this move me?' The authors encourage, indeed insist on, the interrogation of stories as cultural productions. Personal feelings are regarded with suspicion; gaps in the text are filled, not through the reader's imagination, but 'with ideas that are already available in the reader's culture' which can offer clues about 'the dominant attitudes of your culture.' [Moon, 1990, p.36]

Other protagonists

Stibbs [1991] strongly supports a deconstructionist approach, which encourages readers to be on their guard against the snares laid for unwary story readers who are foolish enough to be 'taken in':

> 'When the text is 'showing', it tricks readers into forgetting that they are experiencing a verbal artefact: they feel as if they are directly experiencing what the story tells directly. ... We talk as if we become 'lost in the world of the book' or 'feel as if we are there' and can be easily misled into thinking that reading is a form of vicarious experience or even identification. ... I argue that students, by recognising that they are being told what novelists would like them to think they are being shown, should learn to resist uncritical

> commitment to worlds which authors try to create and which are insidiously and often unintentionally loaded with ideology.' [p.93-94]

In an article published in English in Education in Summer 1993, Stibbs is even more scathing about the notion that we should ever allow ourselves to enter into story worlds:

> 'Far from being transparent windows on the [real] world or aesthetic objects, [literary texts] are messages deeply imbued with cultural and political assumptions, there to be read by those who recognise them (or subliminally absorbed *by impressionable readers unequipped with crap detectors.*' [my italics] [p.53]

Reid [1994], identifies

> 'One of the problems associated with "reading the media" with students [as] a notable reluctance to *problematize* a media text.' [my italics] [p.3]

Williamson and Woodall [1996] broaden the argument that cultural analysis should be applied to pupils' readings of literature, to encompass every aspect of the English curriculum:

> 'What is required is a reconception of what the subject English might be in order that we might engage with the politics of culture which structure our experience of life and personal identity.' [p.5]

They claim that:

> 'the personal growth view of English teaching which dominates current practices... is far from liberating... because it comes from a tradition of Western humanism which stresses personal attitudes and personal responsibility at the expense of social forces... failing to

address the politics of culture which actively structure both personal and social identities.' [p.6]

They suggest, moreover, that:

'...as any honest English teacher knows, personal response is essentially a fallacy because all response is at least mediated... both by a range of cultural practices, attitudes and beliefs which enmesh reading and also by the demands of the discipline of literary studies itself.' [p.6]

The two authors do not appear to take into account that the interpretive community through whose thinking their own politicised view is mediated, will be equally enmeshing for pupil readers in the demands which it chooses to make on them:

'We argue that a cultural analysis model must lie at the heart of a coherent, meaningful curriculum for English... Cultural analysis is often criticised for having a specific political agenda and for ignoring the role of literature in personal development. This view is, however, misconceived. We do not deny that there can be personal growth through the study of literature but would argue that real personal growth goes beyond the individual exploration of thought and feeling in relation to literary texts to embrace a deepened awareness of cultural being.' [p.9]

Peter Thomas [1994], takes an equally politicised stance towards both story writing and story reading:

'Fiction is a minority art affecting a particular kind of audience, which may not be the audience best targeted for an attack on social wrongs. In a society which puts a high premium on other kinds of address, more direct, confrontational and assertive, it may be that skill in empathy and narrative does not confer power.' [p.20-21]

Narrative codes

In my conversation with Alastair, he had suggested that looking at Barthes' work might be useful:

because when you're saying that Fiona and you responded differently to the same textual features - one of you was interested in character and one of you was interested in plot - - one of Barthes' things is that texts have a range of codes...

In the first phase of my research, I had chosen not to consider those theorists who devised story codes or blueprints for narrative structure, on the basis that their interest was centred on the *construction* of the text rather than on the reader's *response* to the text. The'structural analyses' offered by both Barthes and Genette are, in fact, more 'dynamic' than I had supposed. Although they are not interested in the reader's contribution to the text, they do consider the implied reader's journey through a story in relation to its structure.

For instance, in his summary of how Genette [1980] explores the intricacies of 'Voice" Rosen [1985] describes how he specifies the following *functions* for the narrator which can offer multiple perspectives to the reader:

> 'the *narrative* function - that of telling the story; the *directive* function, the purpose of which is to direct attention to aspects of the narrative, "stage directions" so to speak...; the *communicative* or *testimonial* function, ... the part [the narrator] takes in the story, possibly affective, moral or intellectual; the *ideological* function, which operates when the *testimonial* function becomes didactive.' [p.35]

Fox [1993] sets out the five codes ascribed to Barthes with the following useful explanations - I give a summarised version:

'The ***proairetic*** code which constitutes the story's actions from beginning to end... [whereby] the meanings of the actions in the story take their significance from the story's closure... [thus] 'driving back through the narrative rather than forward.'... 'It is the implication of what is done or said that the proairetic code is intended to reveal.

The ***hermeneutic*** code is the code of puzzles and mysteries. Whenever the text questions what will happen or leaves the reader guessing, whenever it poses a problem or an enigma, the reader is propelled forwards towards a solution.

The ***semic*** code is present in what Barthes [1970] calls 'flickers of meaning' which, when assembled, structure the nature of a character or a setting. ...
What are these *semes* then? I interpret them to be the small details which give us the sense of a person or a place....

The ***symbolic*** code which structures the larger themes or ideas organized over the whole narrative.

The ***cultural*** code reaches out from the text to the social world, which, it is implied by the narrative discourse, the reader will recognize and accept.' [p.171-172]

Again, it is possible to see how these features of narrative text which Barthes identifies, are similar to those described both by Genette and Iser. Without an implied or indeed a real reader, the codes would lie dormant in the verbal text. As it is, we can see how there is a dynamism to the movements backwards and forwards across the text, that relates to the meaning a reader can evoke through the codes.

Barthes and Genette have an important contribution to make, in these respects, to a reader's increasing awareness of how the literary conventions of a narrative enable her to move around in it.

Stibbs [1991] is helpful in suggesting how this awareness of narrative codes can be brought into play in the classroom. His explanation of different aspects of narrative analysis is excellent for demystifying some of the structuralist terms: *recit* and *histoire* become 'plot' and 'story'; *mimesis* and *diegesis* become 'showing' and 'telling'; *functions* and *indices* become 'forks' and 'descriptors' - and *syntagmatic and paradigmatic* become 'horizontal' and 'vertical' relationships. However, ingenious though his many structural diagrams are, as a teacher educator, Stibbs is careful to point out that:

> 'I am not arguing for a "narrative parsing" or explicit knowledge of narratological terms in classrooms, any more than I would for formal grammar as an aid to developing *students' ability to recognise and generate meaning*.'
>
> [my italics][p.56]

Visual texts

In my conversation with Alastair, he expresses the view:

'I wish I saw a great deal more work exploring visual narrative... I think in some ways I put to one side the anxieties I've got about written verbal narrative... I'm much more concerned that other media that seem to me quite crucial are simply not there to the extent they should be...'

It is now widely recognised by primary teachers thanks to Bennett [1979], Moss [1981] and Waterland [1985], that the visual text in picture stories is as important as the words. The pictures do not play a subsidiary role as mere

illustrations, they form an integral part of the story itself. Doonan [1993] describes in some detail the nature of reading and interpreting visual texts not just in relation to what the pictures tell you that the words leave out, but in relation to the crafting - textures, patterns, frames, perspectives and so on.

Benton [1992] also explores how the various ways in which we read both visual and verbal art forms can be inter-related:

> 'My general aims in this chapter [10] are to explore the reading process in relation to the arts of painting and poetry and to argue the need for their greater integration in the classroom.' [p. 111]

Similarly, in exploring the differences between reading a film and reading a book, Stibbs [1991] in his comparison of *Tess*, the novel by Hardy and *Tess*, the film by Polanski, comments interestingly on the visual medium and what it 'shows' the viewer/reader, which reveals how differently we have to read these two forms of text:

> 'Films can show scenes more economically than words can tell them. Polanski's *Tess* tells you that the milkmaids are faced by a flooded stream... by showing one image of them reflected in the flood. Hardy needs half a page (Ch.23). The sensuality of Tess's lips is clearly shown in the film, but it may (or may not) be inferred from Hardy's description of her enunciation (Ch.2), her strawberry-eating (Ch.5) or her attempts to whistle (Ch.9) Films can use visual metonyms and visual metaphors effectively too. The *Tess* film zooms in on the marmalade jar for Tess's dead infant's flowers to exclude its distracting surroundings. In film, that seems forced: Hardy can more naturally select that detail (Ch.14) because it is normal for writing to select and omit the 'semiotic noise' of irrelevant detail whereas it is hard for a film to present a 'pure' image devoid of its surroundings. Film can also evoke by alluding to other familiar images

> (like Millet's painting for the reapers in *Tess*) where words would have made that allusion laboriously and inappropriately (and distractingly if the image doesn't register).' [p.79]

Summary

These, then, are three possible approaches to reading stories that I have considered in this chapter: through cultural analysis, through their narrative codes and through visual as well as verbal presentation. As I come to its conclusion, I can see no reason why readers should not adopt an aesthetic stance to all three, which involves them, initially, in engaging with the story and subsequently in interpreting its significance and considering how its construction has enabled them to move through it meaningfully.

Chapter Twelve

Reclaiming the imagination

> 'Forming is the work of the active mind; imagination is the shaping spirit.' [Berthoff, 1984, p.ii]

> 'The reader creates with the product of two imaginations, his or her own and the writer's.' [Benton, 1992, p.17]

Well, I have returned from my second excursion further afield not so much disconcerted, as actually strengthened in my belief that responses to stories which involve the reader's imagination do have a place in the teaching of literature. As I had expected, though, those who adopt the view that responses to fictional texts should no longer be aesthetic in an individually experiential sense, are indeed inclined to be dismissive of readers like me who welcome the power of stories to engage our thoughts, our feelings and our imaginations.

We are written off as:

> 'tractable people [engaged in] 'a naive, absorbed virtual experience model of reading' [Stibbs,1991]

or as having:

> 'a nostalgic affection for literature' [Peel and Hargreaves, 1995]

or as:

> 'innocent readers' [Williamson and Woodall, 1996]

or, most sneeringly of all, as:

> 'impressionable readers unequipped with crap detectors' [Stibbs, 1993].

Let me make it clear, before I enlist further support for taking an aesthetic approach to story reading, that of course I accept the many ways, both social and linguistic, in which our cultures influence the way we think, speak, read and write. As I have indicated at the end of the previous chapter, when as story readers, we come to interpret the significance that a text has for us (relating the way the story world is presented, to the world outside the story as we know it), a heightened awareness of the cultural factors which colour the perceptions of authors and readers alike, becomes central to our interpretation.

What I cannot accept, is the view that pupils should be taught to hold a story at arm's length from the moment they start to read, either ignoring or denying the possibility of engagement. The warning that Britton [1968] gave with the school of New Criticism in mind, is equally applicable today to those university lecturers and teachers like Williamson and Woodall who place the stress on 'engagement with the politics of culture' rather than engagement with the story:

> 'To have children take over from their teachers an analysis of a work of literature which their teachers in turn have taken over from the critics or their English professors - this is not a short cut to literary sophistication; it is a short circuit that destroys the whole system.' [p.6]

Supporters of the desirability and value of making a personal response

Now let me bring in other voices which have also contributed to this debate over recent years, writing in support of the view that individual readers should be encouraged to engage personally with the stories they read. Wolf

[1988] in a booklet written for the College Entrance Examination Board in the USA, observes that:

> 'Many [students] seem unsure about *how to enter and engage the complex subjunctive worlds of novels and plays.*'
> [my italics][p.2]

She asserts that:

> 'If the act of reading is in fact a matter of thinking and feeling along any number of paths at once, we are short changing students if all we talk about is decoding or analyzing the structure of a text. We also have an obligation to recognize and educate other reading processes that frequently go unnamed. These include the way students engage with what they read, their reflections on the reading process, and whether they think about books as comments on or questions about the culture inside which they live.' [p.8]

In an article entitled *Deconstructing Deconstruction* [1992], Stables claims that:

> 'the vast majority of English teachers are still committed to the notion of English as a subject in which the cognitive and affective work together, and to *the need to value and develop personal response.*'

He regards:

> 'the first strength of the liberal-humanist tradition [to be] that *it honours the personal, both in terms of the artist and of the reader* ...' [my italics][p.20]

Peel and Hargreaves [1995] report that in Australia, teachers:

> 'saw the 'personal growth' model as the most important, closely followed by 'cultural analysis'.

In England:

> 'What emerges from these initial soundings... is evidence of

a widespread belief in the enduring nature of human behaviour, and of 'English' as a personal subject which provides space, pleasure and opportunities to reflect on moral and ethical issues.' [p.44]

The authors of the report do point out, however, that:

'There are two striking features of the UK part of the survey. The first... is the contrast between the support from students and secondary school teachers for a model of English which nourishes individual self-development, provides pleasure and opportunities for creativity and personal growth, and *the scepticism evident in about 50% of the university lecturers* sampled... about *notions of pleasure* and *the idea that there is an authentic personal self in any of us at all.*' [my italics][p.45]

The second striking feature that Peel and Hargreaves pick out from the UK survey, is:

'that teachers and other English specialists embrace a variety of views, some of which appear to be contradictory. Many of the respondents who endorsed the 'personal growth' model also agreed with the post-structuralist view... namely that the meaning of texts is governed by historical and cultural factors, and although these beliefs are not mutually exclusive, they do represent very contrasting views of truth and authenticity.' [p.45-6]

The authors of the survey thus perceive:

'teachers pulled in two separate directions by their beliefs....'

Their suggested solution to this dichotomy is that teachers should:

'share this debate with their students... , working with a new model of English that resists closure.' [p.46]

I see the issue somewhat differently. There is surely no conflict between a recognition of the cultural factors which influence both writers and readers and a regard for English 'as a personal subject which provides space, pleasure and opportunities to reflect on moral and ethical issues.' Indeed those opportunities are closely related to perceptions about gender, race, class and the politics of power. Rosenblatt, Scholes, Bakhtin and Britton all give full support to the recognition of the *social* as well as the *literary* aspects of works of fiction.

In fact, there seem to me to be two issues here:
the *stage at which* readers are encouraged to make a cultural analysis of a story and whether the *individuality* of writers and readers is also to be authenticated with regard to the creation - and re-creation - of stories. Are we to regard that personal evocation of the world of the story as a dangerously misleading illusion, which requires crap detectors to dispel it before it can take a hold? Or are we to encourage such evocations as the imaginative experiences which individual story tellers and story writers have always offered to their listeners and readers which 'set the work in motion'?

Robert Protherough, Michael Benton and Geoff Fox

For the rest of this chapter, before I return to my own research and to the personal responses which pupils made to stories using my Guidelines, I want to look more closely at the concepts of story - and what story reading involves, offered by three British educators writing in the 80s and 90s - Protherough [1983], Benton and Fox [1985] and Benton [1992]. All three have worked for many years in university education departments, closely involved with primary and secondary teachers of English and all have

expressed a particular interest in the processes which are involved in the teaching of literature in schools. It is their work which will provide a link with the thinking of reader-response theorists on the one hand and the ways in which pupils can be encouraged to respond imaginatively to the stories they read on the other.

The experiential and aesthetically transactive nature of the reader's involvement with the story text

In his introduction, Protherough [1983] observes that:

> 'When as adults we are challenged to explain why certain books are important to us, our instinctive response is to describe the experience of reading them.' [p.3]

He insists that:

> 'Fiction is not an exercise in explanation or persuasion but a potential experience, the nature of which is in part dependent on the reader.' [p.14]

He describes this experience of reading fiction as:

> '...an activity variously termed a transaction, a re-creation, a performance, an interplay, a participation, an interaction, a construction or an encounter.' [p.26]

Protherough warns against responses to fiction which are over-intellectualised and disallow our feelings. He quotes D.H.Lawrence:

> 'We judge a work of art by its effect on our sincere and vital emotion and nothing else'. [p.2]

He cautions readers that:

> ' [as] Ingarden (1967) has pointed out, critics who are extremely familiar with works of art can come to judge

them as a purely intellectual experience, without being aesthetically moved at all.' [p.143]

Benton and Fox describe how:

'...what the reader brings to a story is as important as what the text offers in the sense that we fit the reading of a new story into the blend of our literary and life experiences.' [p.5]

Benton observes:

'In Piagetian terms, assimilating the textual material and accommodating it to our own experience are fundamental ways in which literary understanding operates.' [p.33]

The creative, imaginative nature of this transaction

Protherough writes:

'A child's enjoyment only begins when she or he is "productive" or "creative", when the text brings into play the reader's or listener's own faculties.' [p.28]

Benton suggests that:

'...in remaking a story from a text, readers generate "a secondary world" in their own imaginations. They are performers, interpreters of a text. Granted they do not have the expressive outlet of a stage and an audience but instead, they build a mental stage and fill it with the people and scenes and events that the text offers...' [p18]

All three educators regard pupil readers as active participants in the enterprise, although Benton also acknowledges that an element of attentiveness is required in the 'taking in':

'*Reading a story is active and passive* - The process... is one that requires readers to invent an illusion in which they will

willingly believe for the duration of its existence. They are active in its construction... yet they are passive recipients of the effects of this world, essentially submissive to its power. The reader's mind both *makes* things happen and *lets* things happen.' [p.17-18]

Mental imagery

Benton is particularly interesting in his explorations of and hypotheses about mental imagery. As this visualising process has intrigued me from an early stage in my own investigation, I shall here describe his suggestions in some detail. Clearly, he is indebted as he acknowledges, to Iser's notions of 'ideating', especially with respect to the 'snowball effect' of images as we read.

He distinguishes between:

'the *process* of image-building and the *variety* of image manifestation.' [my italics] [p.31]

The former is temporal in the sense that the experience becomes:

'a continuous fluctuation [whereby] processes of superimposition, collision and modification take place.' [p.31]

The latter is related to the 'relative precision or vagueness' of the images we encounter as they are 'more or less formed' and to the 'sensory modes' in which we perceive them.

In their earlier work [1985], Benton and Fox regard the visual as the predominant imagistic mode, 'the prime coinage of the brain', although they acknowledge that sometimes our images are based upon auditory or other

senses:

> 'Writers and readers frequently testify to their visual sense of the world they imagine. Less frequently they refer to auditory images and only relatively rarely to those drawn from the other senses.' [p.5]

They suggest that:

> 'The [imagistic] substance of the secondary world... is the most productive area to share if we want to know a reader's process of responding to a story. To ask children regularly "What pictures do you have in your mind's eye?" is to honour the validity and the importance of the individual's response while simultaneously generating discussion in which the sharing of likenesses and differences can take place.' [p.7]

Voices in the text

If our *visual* sense contributes most imagistically in the mind's eye when we read, it is our *auditory* sense which enables us to hear not only spoken dialogue but also the thoughts of the characters and of the narrator. An interest in the voices which sustain the story and which 'do the telling' is developed most extensively by Benton:

> 'Books are embalmed voices. The reader's job is to disinter them and breathe life into them.' [p17]

He suggests that as readers 'track back and forth decoding signs into meanings', at the same time, they experience the text as 'an *imaginative dialogue*, of the sort described by Wayne Booth [1961]:

> 'In any reading experience there is an implied dialogue among author, narrator, the characters and the reader.' [p.155]

Where Benton previously draws on Iser's work on visualising, here, he draws on Bakhtin's work:

> 'In Bakhtin the dialogic imagination is described throughout in auditory terms... a way of saying that the virtual world the reader experiences during reading... is activated by the voices.' [p.38]

I am intrigued here, by this focus on our *auditory* sense. It causes me to wonder whether in a stereophonic kind of way, to be fully activated story readers, we need to be *audio-visual*, cultivating bidden as well as unbidden images in the mind's eye and at the same time tuning in our mental ear to hear the voices which carry us through the story. I also wonder, as with inner speech, whether, if we consciously slow the process down, we can bring both aural and visual impressions into clearer focus.

The shifting viewpoint

Both Protherough and Benton recognise the functional importance of the 'shifting viewpoint' identified by structuralists as well as by reader-response theorists. In his earlier work [1983] Protherough describes how:

> 'the reader's shifting viewpoint makes the different attitudes, viewpoints and perspectives of the story act upon and modify each other.' [p.27]

In his latest book [1995] he takes the view that 'an increasing awareness of the significance of the viewpoints from which a story is told, *with the ability to distinguish the voices of narrator and characters*' [my italics], is an important narratological feature to which the attention of developing story readers needs to be drawn. I italicised the reference to voices because it demonstrates how the reader's own ability to move around the story

depends partly on that same aural acuteness that Bakhtin attributed to 'verbal artists' in general and to story writers in particular.

Benton also recognises the focusing function of the shifting viewpoint much as Iser [1978] also describes it:

> 'the reader's role is to occupy shifting vantage points... and to fit the diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern.' [p.35]

Implications for teaching

Protherough, Benton and Fox all refer specifically to the classroom implications of the aesthetic approach which they advocate for encouraging pupils to respond to stories. Protherough [1983] points out that:

> 'The ways we work with fiction in school will inevitably be conditioned by how we see the relationship between readers and the text.' [p.25]

For all three educators the perception of this relationship involves a shift from placing the prime focus on the text and consequently on what others say about the text, be they critics or teachers, to focusing primarily on what the *pupils* make of a story through their involvement or transaction with it:

> 'There are clear implications for our teaching practice if we hold that meaning is something which develops in *the reader's interaction* with the text rather than something which is in the text and has to be pulled out of it like plums in a pie.' [my italics][1983, p. 29]

Writing this in the early 80's, I guess that Protherough had traditional forms of literary criticism in mind as he later describes how these influence examination questions at O and A level. I find his comment equally relevant to the more recent teaching approaches advocated by the

deconstructionists, who wish to 'pull out' from the first scrutiny of a story, (as Scholes [1987] might have described it, like a rabbit out of a conjurer's hat) textual 'give aways' which reveal the writer's cultural conditioning with regard to class, race and gender. Equally, and closer to the classroom, there are implications for the stance taken to story reading in the SATs at KS2-3, an issue which I address in more detail in Chapter 16.

Benton and Fox are insistent that:

> 'Given a methodology which honours the individuality of a child's response to a story, we must shift the emphasis from teaching which stresses critical analysis and value judgements about stories. *We must rather concentrate on the creative act of reading and the expression of personal responses since this is where delight in literature begins.*'
>
> [my italics] [p.18]

I am reminded here of Britton's caution, made at the Dartmouth Seminar that:

> 'First encounters in the classroom should deliberately hold back formulation, should back away from everything that isn't tentative and partial. We need to encourage, very warmly, *verifications from personal experience*, not frown on the "That's me" identification with a character.'
>
> [my italics] [1968, p.24-5]

All three educators to whom I have referred closely in this chapter, support this pupil-centred approach:

> 'the exploration and development of a young reader's own thoughts and feelings about a text.' [Benton and Fox p.107]
>
> '...the feelings, ideas, attitudes and associations which those words [on the page] and events arouse in them.'
>
> [Protherough, p.29]

Benton and Fox stress that after a story has been read or listened to, pupils need time to consider what they have each 'made' of it before they begin to share their thoughts and feelings:

> 'After a text is read, we need to provide sufficient 'space' for the individual to discover, confirm and perhaps relish his own unique response to it before the ideas of other (his fellow pupils and his teachers) are considered.' [p.109]

Here, I am reminded again of Britton's observation that :

> 'Active response to a work of literature invokes what might be called an unspoken monologue of responses - a fabric of comment, speculation, relevant autobiography. ' [1968, p.8]

But these silent monologues that we have conducted as story readers, in order to evoke the virtual experience of the 'secondary world', require further formulation before they can be shared. We are back to the necessary distinction between the *act* of transformation from words to worlds and our *response* to that experience.

In the next chapter, I shall describe how the Guidelines that I developed initially for teachers, were used in a revised form to help pupils to capture something of what they had 'made', as they wrote, silently and intensively for 10-15 minutes, prior to any discussion of the story which they had just heard.

For as Benton puts it:

> 'These individual experiences are what we have to work with: releasing them into the texture of classroom talk *and coaxing them into the language of children's writing about literature* are the main challenges to methodology.'
>
> [my italics][p.48]

Chapter Thirteen

Primary pupils' 'Secondary Worlds'

In the first phase of my research, I wanted to find out whether, as experienced readers, teachers could make an aesthetic response to the stories of inexperienced pupil writers. In the second phase, I wanted to find out whether the Guidelines which I had evolved could also encourage inexperienced readers to respond in the same personally meaningful way to the stories of experienced writers.

Accordingly, in the spring term, 1996, I made a second set of visits to five primary schools. On each occasion I read a short story aloud to the Year 6 or Year 5/6 classes; for the next 15-20 minutes the children then wrote down what they had 'made' of the story inside their heads while they listened, following my Guidelines for making a personally meaningful response.

On the first visit, I used a version of the Guidelines which invited them to make both the kinds of response (engaged and appreciative), that I had been asking for from the teachers. It became evident that in the limited time available, asking the children to make this switch from one way of looking to another was too much to ask. I therefore invited the other four classes to make the first kind of response only, using a re-written version of the Guidelines which emphasised the experiential nature of the act of listening to the story as an essential precursor to their response to it.

Most of all, I wanted to activate their imaginations; my idea of suggesting that they become 'an invisible presence' in the story seemed to work well for most of them:

Guidelines - fifth version

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW YOU CAN LISTEN TO A STORY - AND THEN WRITE ABOUT IT

FIRST

As you are listening to the story (or reading it to yourself), imagine that you are an invisible presence in it. Watch what is happening and listen to what the characters are saying or thinking. You can choose to look down on the scene or you can choose to put yourself inside one of the characters.

NEXT

Now, write about how you imagined the story while you were watching what was happening. What thoughts or feelings did you have? Describe any moments of the story as you pictured them in your mind. Did the story make you wonder about anything?

TAKE YOUR TIME! WRITE DOWN YOUR RESPONSE AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE

The pupils' responses that I collected, parallel those of the teachers, in the sense that they are limited to a single written response, made at the completion of the reading of the story. I chose to focus on written responses in the first phase of my research, because *evaluatively* that is the form of written response that teachers most commonly make to pupils' completed stories. Similarly, this is still the most common form of response that pupils are required to make for testing or examination purposes, especially now that course work has been drastically reduced.

Let me make it clear that in classroom activities, I fully recognise the value and importance of a variety of modes of aesthetic response, both oral and written, including dramatic and visual exploration, keeping journals to track a reader's changing perceptions, creating alternative versions or extensions of

a text. However, if, as I believe, the formulation of a reader's experiential engagement with story provides the seed bed from which further insights can grow, it seemed worth offering my Guidelines to pupils as one strategy which could encourage that engagement and that formulation.

In this chapter, I show how primary children can express their own thoughts, feelings and visual impressions in response to a story - if they are invited to take an aesthetic stance to their listening or reading in the first place. I also offer some of their own comments about the Guidelines which indicate how they interpreted them, along with the observations offered by one of their teachers. Two classes responded to *Ice* by Chris Powling [1981] two classes responded to *Bella* by Robert Leeson [1994] and one class responded to the fight between Beowulf and Grendel's mother in Kevin Crossley Holland's translation [1982].

Picturing - what to look for

I start with visual impressions because, as Benton and Fox [1985] have suggested, 'picturing' plays an important role in what the children 'made' of these stories - ie. in evoking the substance of their virtual texts. As I have explained in Chapter 10, I had on many occasions over the past decade, asked children to 'picture think' as a pre-drafting activity for creating their own stories and for responding to other people's poems and stories. At this stage in my research, I had also read Iser's *The Act of Reading* [1978] and been intrigued, as I have described in Chapters 9 and 10, by his thoughts about the mental process of 'ideating'. In my encounter with the responses which a Year 8 class had written about *The Knight and the Mushroom*, I already had evidence that pupils appear to be able to fill in the gaps in a text visually, with more facility than their teachers, as examples in Chapter 4

illustrate.

Benton and Fox claim that:

> 'it remains a reasonable generalisation that the secondary world is conveyed to us primarily through the medium of mental picturing' [p.7]

For the pupils in each of these top junior classes, this would appear to be the case. Generally speaking, their visual responses were more extensive than those which expressed other thoughts and feelings. The following examples give some indication of how the children variously evoked the world of story from the words by consciously 'imaging' or imagining it. I have restricted myself for reasons of length, to choosing just two examples from each class, although the choices were often difficult to make, there were so many possibilities.

Bella - by Robert Leeson

It was interesting that in both classes, it was predominantly their impression of the setting rather than the characters, that the children described. Apart from a glimpse of what Bella's face looked like after she had tricked the boys or when she was 'being mad' with them, all the visual references were to aspects of the landscape which had either been mentioned by the author or added by the reader. Denise draws on her own recollective memories of the colouring of canal boats and Joanne provides a long shot of the whole scene. Alex maps out the terrain in her mind and Laura shows how she moves through it.

I could see the river clearly and the gorse bushes and when they were running down the hill to go to the river. The river was very muddy around the banks and I could see the canal boats which were red and green.[Denise]

I picture the hill very steep and spotted like a dalmation with green underneath and yellow/dark green spots and the river at the bottom by the old cart track.
When they got out of the river I can imagine Bella being mad with the boys because they didn't let her in.
I know the author didn't mention it but I imagined a windmill on the hill with a red roof and white walls, and in the distance a police station.[Joanne]

I imagine their house is up on some sort of hill. All of the houses in their street are joined together. Then there is the Gorse Hill and a little bank like this [quick sketch] - and then there is a bridge and the town.[Alex]

I imagined that Harry, Jammy and Bella and Robert were running down the hill towards the river. I can imagine them in the water, splashing, and I could see the boats going past. I could see the boys running up the hill from P.C. Collins...
I can imagine Bella having a lot of fun when she said P.C. Collins was coming. I could see her face as she walked up behind them.
I could imagine the boys jumping over the gorse bushes and I wonder how high the bushes were. [Laura]

Ice by Chris Powling

I have included Ben's response because he has contributed so much vivid detail from his own imagination, and Claire's because she combines seeing and feeling and can picture both sides of the hill simultaneously from her aerial viewpoint. I include Jamie's response partly because it incorporates aural and tactile impressions as well as visual ones and partly because he imagines a scene outside the story altogether, when it's summer, not winter and Jimmy is confronting yet another challenge which makes him sick with fear. I chose Anna's description of how she found herself switching between

pictures and words as an excellent explanation of this mental process!

I saw a black and yellow toboggan riding down the hill and the boys wearing woolly hats and goggles so they don't get snow in their eyes - and a scarf. They were all grinning and shouting at Jimmy all alone on the bank of the pond. And when the toboggan crashed I could see the toboggan snapped in half and all the boys bunched up.
I saw the park as a big hill and the pond as a fish pond.
[Ben]

The best part I imagined was when the toboggan was coming straight at Jimmy on the pond. I imagined looking at the scene from up above.I could also see Jimmy feeling all alone and Teddy, Pete and Kit having fun on the other side of the hill. ... I pictured Teddy went down the hill first, then Pete, then Kit, right at the beginning. [Claire]

I could see the toboggan being played with when Jimmy went off. ...I could picture the park with the boating pond at the bottom and the place where they sledge off on the toboggan. I could see them bumping down the hill [at] about 80 m.p.h. and Jimmy saying "Stop!" to Teddy, Pete and Kit. I could imagine the boating pond with no water in it. ... I saw him at the diving board at the summer pool. [Jamie]

Sometimes I saw pictures in my head, a bit like on TV. Then at other times, I found myself looking at the words. It was like changing channels - on one channel it was pictures and on the other it was the writing. I saw the bit where Jimmy was stomping off. [Anna]

Beowulf - translated by Kevin Crossley-Holland

On this occasion, the children did not have a copy of the text in front of them. I described Beowulf's earlier wrestling match with Grendel and then read the account of the underwater fight aloud from my own copy of this translation. I

had written several 'key' words on the board, including *Hrunting*, the name of Beowulf's sword - but it did not occur to me to write up his own name. It was interesting when I came to read the responses to see how many children had written 'Beowolf' or as Louis does, 'Bearwolf' - an act of symbolism that had never occurred to me throughout the three years that I studied the original version at university! I also wonder about Rhodri's mis-spelling of 'bare'.

Protherough [1983] observes that:

> 'A child's enjoyment only begins when she or he is 'productive' or 'creative', when the text brings into play the reader's or listener's own faculties.' [p.28]

I think there is no doubt that these children thoroughly enjoyed inventing their own versions of the fight beneath the lake. Louis glories in the technicolour details of the monster's blood and slime. His picture of the warriors, who are not described in the text, must come from other texts either verbal or more likely televisual:

The path I thought looked like the one in the wood near our house. The lake looked enclosed and very big. The corslet looked very strong. The house at the bottom of the lake looked like a cave, it was very big and dark with lots of sharp things hanging from the roof. Then Grendel's Mum came round a sharp corner and grabbed him. His sword was very long and sharp. The venom was like acid, really green and fizzy. Grendel's [mother's] blood was thick and slimy and really gooey. When he cut her head off, the blood poured out and covered him. Then when he swam up he was clean. His warriors were wearing hats with horns coming out and they had beards and long thick bushy hair. Grendel's mother had slime coming from a cut where Beowolf had cut her.' [Louis]

I'm not sure where Rhodri's Barbarian comes from - maybe another television series, but I guess her witch-like image of Grendel's mother comes from her reading of fairy tales. Her description reveals how there are moments when she slips into becoming the hero:

'...the monster's sword barely missed my face' and 'The soldiers when Beowolf climbed out were extra excited when I climbed up.'

Like some of the earlier respondents to *The Knight and the Mushroom*, Rhodri captures the sinister mood of the story's setting through her capacity to visualise it:

At the beginning, before Beowolf was described, I imagined him as a Barbarian with muscles the size of two arms and his top bear [sic]. But as the story went on, I imagined him more manly...
The most realistic picture I got in my head was of the monster's sword barely missing my face and hitting with a clanging sound onto the chainmail.
I imagined the rivers black and bogs with fungus and algae floating on the top, with the forest pitch black.
The soldiers when Beowolf climbed out were extra excited when I climbed up.
I imagined Grendel's mother as a gruesome lady giant 30 ft tall, with spots and wrinkles, grey hair and a brown cloak.
Then at the end when Beowolf visited the Queen she looked like she was going to faint.
I imagined the underground cave Beowolf fought in was brown and dark and the lake had a horrible darkness with horrible creatures. [Rhodri]

Expressions of feeling

The same range of felt responses occurred in the children's comments as in

the teachers'. Some were strongly empathetic, others drew on feelings and situations which the children had experienced for themselves which led them to sympathise with the plight of one of the characters because they 'understood' how he or she felt. Sometimes more general feelings about the whole story were expressed.

Bella

Bella was the shortest of the three stories and revolved around the joke that Bella got her own back on brother for not letting her swim in the river by pretending that the village P.C. was coming. A few children, like the boys, were taken in and didn't realise that she was pretending, but most enjoyed the joke whilst at the same time being able to appreciate Bella's frustration and then glee at her revenge - and also the boys' sudden panic followed by the discomfort of their quandary.

I thought it was funny and happy and I liked the bit when they got out of the water and hid around the bushes and one of the boys did not have any clothes on. I think that bit was funny about the policeman. [Donna]

I imagined Bella was angry with Harry because he wouldn't let her in the river, so that's why she played the trick on Harry and said P.C. Collins was coming. I imagined Harry was terrified when he hid behind a gorse-bush which was prickly. ... I could feel what Bella was feeling when she was playing the trick. [Denise]

Feelings in my brain

I thought Bella was left out when Harold was in the Old River and she had to keep on the bank because only boys was allowed in the river. I thought Jammy was a little worried when Bella saw Constable Collins coming towards them from the locks.[Ian]

In my head I felt really sorry for Bella because the boys wouldn't let her in the water with them. Also I felt sorry for Harold because Bella never picked up his clothes and he was naked... Also I felt sorry for all the boys as they were trying to hide behind the gorse bushes naked.
I liked it when Robert Leeson said in ten seconds flat they were up the hill and when Bella said "Your bum's showing", that made me laugh.[Jenny]

Ice

The plot of Powling's story also hinges on a misunderstanding but it is less light-hearted than *Bella*. The scene is wintery and the mood depressed as Jimmy mooches off on his own, thoroughly miserable at what he experiences as his own timidity and inability to enjoy the tobogganing in the way that the older boys are doing. Readers are led to believe that he risks his life as he moves out onto the ice of the boating pond in order to 'practise' being brave. He laughs at the end when the others crash his sledge because he is relieved that there was no water in the lake after all.

Where Bella is resourceful, Jimmy is vulnerable, consequently his plight evoked responses that were more empathetic or sympathetic than the responses to Bella's behaviour. I think they speak for themselves.

When the boys were going down the hill it reminded me of yesterday when I went sledging. I was a little bit scared at first but I had a go and it was all right. ... It's like your worst nightmare, a toboggan with three people hurtling towards you at anything over fifty miles an hour. ...
I sympathise with Jimmy because he was feeling left out because I've felt that way before. [Matt]

If this was in real life, I would have worried a lot. I did actually worry in some parts of the story. ... I felt very sorry for Jimmy because he was feeling left out.[Tina]

I could really imagine that I was there and it was almost like I was Jimmy. ... When Jimmy was on the ice and he was sweating and just going to stand up, I could really imagine those bits. I imagine that Jimmy felt a little bit lonely and scared. ... If I was Jimmy, I would have been scared to go in the toboggan and down Martin's Hill in between lamp posts and trees and the dips. [Mitchell]

I was really frightened when Teddy, Pete and Kit were on the toboggan. I thought it was going to shatter the ice and when they landed onto the ice I had this twisting in my stomach. I think that I would have felt left out and I would have felt very relieved that I didn't go through the ice. I would have really not liked the story if Jimmy, Pete, Teddy and Kit got stuck under the ice and drowned. [Rikki]

Beowulf

The felt responses to what was happening in the depths of the lake, were much shorter and interspersed with how these events were being pictured in listeners' minds. Maybe it is more difficult to empathise with a hero than with a contemporary character - or to be genuinely, gut-twistingly afraid of the monster who is more to be relished than feared, although Beowulf's first encounter with Grendel which I had also described by way of introduction to the lake fight, did raise some hackles.

The fight was so exciting it felt like I was the one fighting. [Jonathan]

The bit when Beowulf was swimming down I felt really excited and eager to listen to the next bit. I had the same sort of feeling when Grendel's mother was just about to stab Beowulf. I felt sick when it reached the bit about where Beowulf found the dead body of Grendel. ... It felt

strange when the sword melted. ...
I felt really sick at the bit where Beowulf lay in wait for the ferocious Grendel and where he tore Grendel's arm off.
[Chris]

The most disgusting bit was when he pulled his arm off. It made me feel cold and scared. In my mind I said I hope it is not true.' [Jennifer]

When it came to Grendel's mother coming and getting another man I was a bit shocked but it just made me more interested in the story. [Tabitha]

My tummy felt strange all the way through. [Ian]

Pupils' thoughts about the stories

My analysis of the different kinds of thinking that the personal responses of the teachers and myself had demonstrated, included:

Reflecting, Interpreting, Making value judgements, Speculating and Making connections with other stories.

The only form of thinking which did not appear in these primary responses was the last one, with the exception of two *Beowulf* readers. One commented that:

I pictured Grendel and his mother to be a blue, large, ugly monster a bit like the Minotaur in Greek mythology.

The other:

It made me think of this film called "Brain Dead". I thought Grendel was a rat monster with a head of a rat and the rest of the body like a fish...

Aesthetic responses are not confined to a reader's capacity to visualise or

empathise; cognition has an equally important part to play. Like the adults, these children's thoughts were often related to their views about the behaviour of the characters. This was particularly so in the responses to *Ice*, where many readers disapproved of the behaviour of the older boys in commandeering Jimmy's toboggan and then breaking it. Thoughts also revealed how readers anticipated what was going to happen or their grasp of its significance once it had happened.

Bella

The first three responses from Nathan, Eleanor and Lucy, offer comments on the behaviour of the characters; Gemma sums up her interpretation of the outcome:

I thought that Bella was some silly little girl but she wasn't, she was a brave girl and she was not afraid to go swimming with no clothes on. [Nathan]

I thought that Jimmy was being a bit silly jumping into the river like that.He must have been really hot and sweaty to jump into a dirty river. ... Bella was very cheeky a lot of the time but she was a bit mean to Harold when she didn't get his clothes.... [Eleanor]

I think this story would not happen in real life because most children obey what their parents say. I think the boys in the story think [of] Bella as a girl who just likes to follow them around and annoy them. I think Bella is a bit of a tomboy. [Lucy]

I think that Bella got her own back for not going in the water. [Gemma]

Ice

There were almost as many 'thoughtful' responses to this story as those

which offered visual impressions and again it was difficult to make a selection. I have grouped the comments that were most commonly made under three of the headings for 'Thoughts' from the Framework for Engagement that I mapped out in Chapter 8: Speculating/Wondering, Making Value Judgements and Interpreting.

Speculating/Wondering

Many of the speculative comments were retrospective, as pupils recollected the thoughts that had come into their heads while they were listening to the story. In this sense, they are similar, I think, to the process which Benton describes as 'anticipating/retrospecting'; they reveal how readers were thinking ahead - *as now they think back*.

When the story was being read, I was thinking that the ice was cold and if the ice was going to break and if the pond was cold and dark. [Rachel]

I thought they were all going to die - my mind jumped ahead of the story. When all of them were still alive, I realised what happened and that they were all safe. [Oliver]

When he saw the other three at the top of the hill and saw them getting ready to come down the hill, he should have started to come off the ice then, instead of shouting up the hill. When they were coming, I thought they were going so fast that they were going to hit Jimmy on the ice and then he was going to break his legs. [Samuel]

I think Teddy, Pete and Kit were going to crack the ice but it turned out to be concrete instead. Teddy, Pete and Kit should have gone somewhere else because [so that] they wouldn't break the toboggan. ... Teddy, Kit and Pete were lucky it was concrete because if it was ice, they would have drowned. ... Jimmy was lucky because if it was ice it

could have cracked and Jimmy would have fell into the water. [Christopher]

Maybe because it came last, only a few children responded directly to the question 'Did the story make you wonder about anything?' Those who did, seemed to be encouraged to think beyond the confines of the story to 'before' and 'after'.

In a way, the story made me wonder why Jimmy was scared in the first place. I wonder what will happen to Jimmy's toboggan if he gets another one.[Charlotte]

I wonder how [what] Jimmy's Dad would have thought when he finds out that Teddy, Pete and Kit had broken the toboggan and not let Jimmy have a go - because after all Jimmy's Dad made it and he made it for Jimmy... [James]

Making value judgements

In my 12th Research Paper, I observe how the need that pupils felt to make value judgements about the behaviour both of the older boys and of Jimmy, pushed several of them into using modal verb forms in their writing. Writing down your thoughts can be complicated in ways that lead to further language as well as further social development.

I thought that he wasn't really chicken but *he could have been* easily.[Rebecca]

I thought it was stupid when Jimmy went on the ice because he was risking his life just *so he could do it* and try to be brave and not be a chicken.*I would rather be* a chicken than go on the ice myself.[Carys]

If I was on the ice *I would have wiped* the snow off and

seen how deep it was or how thick the ice was. When he got to the middle and he looked back at the trail he made, *he should have looked* how deep or thick it was.
When he saw the other three at the top of the hill and saw them getting ready to come down the hill, *he should have started* to come off the ice then instead of shouting up the hill.[Samuel]

Interpreting

Making value judgements such as the above, about the behaviour of the characters in the story was the most common form of interpretive response from pupils in both classes. The only specific interpretation of the actual text came from Hayley who wrote:

At the end, when Jimmy shouted "Don't break it! Don't break it!" it meant two things - what he meant and what they thought he meant.[Hayley]

Another interesting example of interpretive thinking comes from Rebecca, as she tries to work out for herself whether Jimmy had an inkling about the pond being drained or not:

I think Jimmy was very clever and he only pretended that he thought the boats were under the water buried. I think Jimmy did have a little bit of an idea that the water was drained when it was icy. ...If Jimmy didn't have any idea about the pond being drained, then that might have been why he started to croak a bit when Pete-Kit-Teddy were coming down Martin's Hill at top speed. [Rebecca]

Rebecca's teacher commented:

Rebecca's response is interesting because she makes reference to the character of Jimmy, analysing the type of person he is. She is clearly thinking beyond the text. It is also interesting that she is undecided as to whether Jimmy knew the pond was drained or not - so considers her feelings towards the character in both cases - debating with herself.

Beowulf

Very few pupils expressed their thoughts directly about the Beowulf story - where they did occur, again, they were interspersed mainly with visual imagery. Here are two examples:

When the knife was in Grendel's mother's hand I felt a bit worried. I pictured Grendel's mother with big red eyes, a green, wrinkly body and short, stubby legs. I didn't think Beowulf could hold his breath that long. The bit where the warriors got eaten was gruesome. The best bit was when Grendel's mother died. I thought the venom would get to Beowulf's hand and kill him. My tummy felt strange all the way through. ... I reckon most of the warriors were chickens and were scared of Grendel. How did Beowulf survive without food or water? [Ian]

To me, Grendel and his mother look alike apart from Grendel's mother is bigger. They are fat and hairy and chunky with three fingers on each hand and foot. I thought it very gory when he tore off Grendel's arm. When it came to Grendel's mother coming and getting another man I was a bit shocked but it just made me more interested in the story. I could really picture the places they had to travel through to get to the lake. It was dim, steaming, boggy and wet. When Beowulf dived in and was at the bottom, I was surprised that he could breathe but it's an old made up story so that could be expected. I pictured a dark, muddy atmosphere and I could really see Grendel's mother charging at him. When Beowulf broke free of the cave I imagined stones and bricks bursting away. The most gory bits were the end bits where Grendel's mother was killed and all the melting and chopping off head bits. [Tabitha]

Some primary pupils' comments on their interpretation of the Guidelines

In two of the primary schools, after the children had shared some of their written responses together as a whole class, I was able to talk with a smaller group about the Guidelines they had been given. We talked about how they had engaged with the story by becoming 'an invisible presence' as this is what seemed to have caught their imaginations as I had hoped that it would.

On the first occasion, David's immediate response to my question:

'Was that a helpful idea or not?'

pulled me up short as he made a distinction which had not previously occurred to me. He said:

You might have been thinking about something else, like you were actually part of the story - like being inside Jimmy's head.

Katey on the other hand said that she had *'felt like God'* as she pictured everything that was happening.

Sally, seemed to have the most moveable set of perspectives when she said:

When we're invisible like, you can be one of the characters and understand their point of view... or you could be someone who's got a completely different point of view, or you can just be invisible and watching as it's going on.

There was one other response to my question about whether being an 'invisible presence' while listening to the story was helpful.Kevin commented that *'It's nice to do it once in a while'* and when I asked him how he would normally be thinking about a story while he was reading it he replied:

I'd be normally like - like staring at something, like just thinking about the story

when you've got it in front of you.

Daren added:

Yeh, sometimes if you listen to it, your mind goes off and ends up like "Oh I'm going to go out and play football".

My interpretation of these comments would be that if the reader is just looking at the words on the page or listening as they flow past him rather than entering into the story they represent, it is much easier to let the mind wander - to playing football once the lesson is over or to what you're going to have for lunch maybe. Whereas being invited to become an invisible presence and to use your mind's eye and your inner ear to follow what is happening, does help to prevent attention wandering to other topics.

Both groups of children that I talked to agreed that the Guidelines had helped them to picture what was happening and to engage with the feelings involved:

I reckon what helped me most was it said to imagine you being there... So that helped me a lot - then I could write down feelings that Jimmy was having.

I was actually on the sledge but I actually went into the ice and died!

[P] So because you were running a different ending to the story in your head, you actually imagined yourself crashing into the ice?
- and all my face cut up on the ice.

I saw when he was crawling on the ice - when he was starting to stand up - I just saw he was going to go into the ice and then that was going to be it.

I saw like a big pond and then I saw him crawling over it and I saw the three

boys just up the top of the hill getting ready and then I saw him stand up and turn round. And then I saw two pictures all at once, the boys coming down and him shouting and then I saw the boys crash and he's, he's laughing 'cos it's funny. I saw the funny side of it and the sad side of it.

A sense of audience and a sense of purpose

When I was talking to Fiona, the teacher of the third Y5/6 class, I reminded her that she had agreed, when we talked about her own responses to children's stories that the formulation involved in writing them down had helped her to extend her own perceptions of the story's meaning. She acknowledges again that a written response is different from a spoken one *'because it's there and you don't lose track of it'.* In other words it doesn't disappear into thin air like an oral response and can therefore act as a useful reference point.

However, in recognising the value of providing opportunities for pupils to respond initially by recollecting their experience of the story in writing, we have somewhat different purposes in mind.

I am inclined to take the view that making this silent response is primarily for the writers themselves:

in so far as they were developing a much fuller response to their thoughts, their feelings, their impressions than if they'd just had the chance to make two or three comments which were one or two sentences long.

Fiona accepts that writing for self can give a sense of audience and purpose:

if the children are clear about why they're doing it for themselves - because they want to reflect on it so they can re-read and see "Oh yeh, that's what I thought about that.

She feels strongly, however, that these written responses are most of all useful as a starting point for discussion:

For me, just writing down for myself wasn't the end. I would find it difficult to just write about the book if that was its sole purpose. It needs that extra bit.

In the context of class teaching I hasten to agree with her. Earlier, she had described how usually either during the reading of a class novel or at the completion of a short story, she would invite a considerable amount of discussion, in small response groups or with everyone together on the carpet. I had observed that whole class discussion allows children little opportunity to offer more than one or two thoughts each and that often new and interesting responses could be discouraged by the trend the talk might take in response to the first few observations, where children tend to chime in to agree with each other. The problem with immediate small group talk is that the teacher and the rest of the class can only pick up on some of the observations that are being made.

During the course of this conversation with Fiona, we both came to agree with a view that Benton [1992] also takes, that having adequate time to write one's own thoughts, feelings and impressions *first* in order, then, *secondly*, to share them (and the variations which would emerge) with others in the class, can give a genuine sense of audience and purpose to the 'silent' writing. In fact I have come to see my Guidelines for pupil readers as a very useful pre-talking activity.

Chapter Fourteen

Some Y8 pupils respond to *Ice*

Although I had focused the attention of the primary children on engagement, I did want to find out whether older pupils with more reading experience would be able to retain an aesthetic stance once they came to write an appreciation. Would they lose sight of their own engagement with the story if they focused on the construction, moving away from specific details into generalisations? Would a sense of the personal meaningfulness of the story disappear if they focused on the way the story was written and how could I word the Guidelines in order, if possible, to prevent this happening?

However, I also wanted to find out how they would respond if they were given the fullest opportunity to recollect what they had made of the story for themselves. Accordingly, I re-wrote the Guidelines yet again, offering pupils a *choice* of responses. In the writing time available, (usually no more than 20-30 minutes), I did not want them to have to switch from 'looking in' to 'looking at' - but I did want to ensure, whichever kind of response they chose, that as far as possible they had all *experienced* the story imaginatively while they were listening to it. For this reason I still put forward the same idea of becoming 'an invisible presence' during the act of reading, that I had written into the Guidelines for primary pupils.

Guidelines - seventh[1] version

RESPONDING TO A STORY - SOME SUGGESTIONS

FIRST

*** As you are reading or listening to the story, imagine that you are an invisible presence in it. Watch what is happening as you shadow the movements of the characters and listen to what they are saying or

[1] The sixth version is presented in the next chapter, which chronologically in part precedes this one

thinking.

NEXT

*** Choose to make your response to the story in **ONE** of these ways:

EITHER

Writing from the Inside

Explain how you imagined the story inside your head. What thoughts or feelings did you have about any of the characters - or about what happened? Describe any moments in the story as you pictured them in your mind. Did the story cause you to wonder about anything as you watched what was going on?

OR

Writing from the Outside

Choose to comment on any of the **techniques** which helped you to imagine what was happening but keep your focus fixed on what you made of the story inside your own head. Here are some suggestions about what you might look for. Comment on them *in any order you like*, depending on what worked best for you as a reader.

<u>The writer's presentation of the characters</u>

How did they 'come across' to you? Was it through dialogue or through what they were thinking silently? Was it through a description of their physical appearance or was it through their actions?

<u>The writer's description of the setting</u>

How did this help you to imagine the scene? What could you picture in your mind?

<u>The writer's account of what happened</u>

Were you drawn in from the start - if so how? Did events move forwards steadily or were there any flashbacks or unexpected twists? Did the story build to a satisfying climax? Did the speed of events change at all?

TAKE YOUR TIME! WRITE DOWN YOUR RESPONSE AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE.

I was interested to find out what older pupils would make of the invitation to enter into the story imaginatively *during the act of reading*. Because a choice of response was now offered, I would also have an opportunity to find out why a reader had opted for one kind of response rather than the other. Pupils in this class were asked, therefore, to comment briefly on the following four questions:

* Was it easy to think of yourself as an 'invisible presence' while you were reading/listening to the story?

* Did thinking about the story in this way help, when it came to making your response?

* What made you choose either the 'inside' or the 'outside' response?

* Were the suggestions about story-writing techniques helpful?

Some of the pupils' comments

In the event, 23 pupils commented on whether or not they had found the Guidelines helpful. This gave me considerably more information than I had been able to garner in conversation from the two small groups of primary pupils and much of it, as I shall describe, was both illuminating and encouraging.

Taking an aesthetic stance during the act of reading

It was clear that for the majority of pupils, placing themselves in the position of an 'invisible presence', however they interpreted that, had been helpful in enabling them to experience and to engage with the story, *whichever kind of*

response they then chose to make to it. The reasons given were that they felt drawn in and could easily picture what was happening:

I found it easy to visualise myself since I do quite a lot in story books at home.

I was able to take a piece of the story and picture it in my head and see what was going on in that place because I could picture up a scene like it and link the two together.

Being an invisible person helped me a lot because I was able to look at things in depth and see and hear everything happening so I could refer back to it as if it had just happened in real life.

For Stacey, *experiencing* the story has given it more immediacy. The same is true for Joanne who illustrates her sense of making an actual encounter as follows:

I think being in the picture helped... It was easier to remember the characters, personalities, scenes... For example, if you met new people yesterday you would remember them, but if yesterday someone described these people to you, you would probably forget.

Difficulties

A few readers did express difficulties about entering the story. For two boys this was because they were bored - the text did not offer them a sufficiently powerful attraction:

It was not easy being an invisible presence...because the story was a bit boring.

...because it was a bit boring and it did not make me feel as if I was there. I don't know why I chose to write from the inside, it was probably because my mates did.

Conversely, two other readers referred specifically to their enjoyment of the

story as a key factor in activating their imagination:

I found it quite easy to be an invisible presence. This is because I liked the story.

I think that if I didn't enjoy the story I wouldn't be able to picture it so well.

At first Hayley doesn't realise that becoming an invisible presence is an invitation to put herself into the story but once she finds herself doing so, it all becomes plain sailing:

I can't imagine an invisible presence that easily, but then I just ...imagine that I'm there myself, so it is easier to picture and that's good.

Tom, who chose to make his response from 'the outside' is able to give an intriguingly narratological reason for rejecting the idea of an invisible presence:

No, it was not easy to think of myself as an invisible presence because most of the story was about thoughts and feelings... I find it easier to be an invisible presence when most of the action takes place outside of a character's brain and somewhere where a person in the scene could see it. I would have listened just as keenly without being invisible.

In this respect,Tom is unusual. Several other pupils related how thinking of themselves as invisibly present, actually helped to focus their attention:

It did help me... because otherwise, I wouldn't have listened.

It helped me to concentrate on the story much greater by imagining being an invisible presence.

The way of being asked to imagine I was an invisible presence *and not just being asked to listen to the story*

really helped.

I am reminded here of the two primary lads who observed:

I'd be normally like staring at something you've got in front of you
and
Sometimes if you just listen to it, your mind goes off and like ends up "Oh I'm going to go out and play football."

I gained the strong impression that on the whole, being invited to 'become an invisible presence' enabled most pupils in this class to look beyond the words on the page in order to create and sustain their own virtual text.

Individual strategies for looking at a story 'from the inside'

Several readers offered intriguing descriptions of how they approach stories experientially for themselves:

When I listen to a story I think of myself as being right in front of them. They never look at me though and each character always in any book has an accent. I think it's good to imagine yourself in the picture. It gets you into the book "litrelie."

I found it very easy to think of myself as an invisible person because I think of myself as a character who is not mentioned. Sometimes I make out I'm a bird that sits on a branch and watches as faraway or close as the writer takes me.

For me, it's not difficult to imagine myself in a story. Sometimes if I like a story enough, I dream about it but I'm no longer an invisible person, I'm one of the characters or a new character who just suddenly came into the book. If the book's a bit boring or not to my taste *it just turns into a pile of words.*

Reasons for choice of response

Writing from the Inside

Nearly all the reasons that pupils gave for choosing this first kind of response referred to this crucial process of imagining:

I chose the inside because it was much easier to imagine being there in the story.

I just chose the inside because I find it easier to use my imagination and give my feelings than to explain about how the characters were explained.

I decided to write from the inside because I could just write about what I had imagined and saw in my head which was clear.

I chose to write from the inside because while reading the story, I could imagine all the characters in my mind.

I chose to write from the inside because it let you imagine more in your mind and write about your feelings about the people.

I think I chose to write from the inside because it seemed more exciting. *You could actually have a chance to bring the story alive in your head.*

Writing from the Outside

At the start of this chapter I posed the question 'Would secondary pupils be able to make an 'appreciative' response focused on construction, which continued to be personally meaningful or would they lose sight of what the story had meant to them, once they turned to the crafting? Nine of the eleven pupils who chose to respond in this way were able to relate the writer's handling of the narrative in some way to their own experience of the story.

I attribute this success to the following factors:

* They had been given a clear indication of the aesthetic stance they should take to the story during the act of reading/listening;

* They had been asked to keep their own experience of the story in mind as they commented on the way the story was written;

*The Guidelines had suggested the kinds of ways in which they might take characterisation, setting and plot into account.

Three pupils gave these suggestions as one of the reasons for their choice:

I found the suggestions very helpful. I need a start to my writing even if it's just one sentence to start. I found the more suggestions the more and easier I can write about stories.

I needed these suggestions to do a piece of work well. They were very helpful.

I found the suggestions very helpful, without them I doubt my answers would be very long.

The pupils' written responses to *Ice* - some examples

Writing from the Inside - Leanne, Lee, Emma, Paul

I have chosen to comment in detail on four responses which indicate how differently pupils were able to take up the invitation to 'Write about the story as you imagined it inside your head.' Where those who chose 'Response Two' all followed the pattern set out in the suggestions, those who chose 'Response One' varied considerably in the extent to which they

focused on their feelings, their thoughts or their visual impressions. Although some were highly visual, this was not as generally the case as it had been for the primary children.

Leanne

Leanne's response is predominantly affective; in drawing on occasions when she, too, has experienced fear, she is able to empathise strongly with Jimmy as she imagines him edging himself across what he believes to be the frozen surface of the pond:

As Jimmy was saying about how he was scared of all these different things, I sort of knew how he felt. I am not scared of the same sort of things as him, I am more scared of ghosts and things [but] I still know what it's like to be scared of them. And when you feel scared of things that other people are not, it makes you want to be brave and do something brave to impress them.
When Jimmy was sliding across the ice, I felt like "Thank God! He made it!" - and then you thought "Well, he's still got to get back..." When he decided to stand up, I was like there next to him, saying "No, don't bother! It's going to crack and you're going to fall through and die."
I was thinking that when he said he saw the toboggan, I thought it was facing away from him and he was trying to get them to look at him to prove how brave he had been.
When it started coming down the hill, I felt like I was there trying to tell him to slither across the ice and try and get away.
When he realised that the pond didn't have any water in it, I thought he probably felt really stupid.

Emma

Emma takes a somewhat different attitude to Jimmy's behaviour, viewing it in the same stern light as she does that of his three so-called friends:

I thought Kit was quite mean and I thought that Kit, Pete and Teddy were just using Jimmy for his toboggan.

I also thought that acting in that manner, the kids were probably between the ages of 11/12.
I found that some parts of the story were very realistic; eg. the part where all three were in the toboggan.
I also thought that it would have been right for Teddy to snap and be angry with Kit; he did deserve it for saying things like "I mean it wasn't that much of a crash." And the crash actually broke the toboggan into pieces.
I also thought the part where the teacher was talking to them about safety on the ice, was very realistic. I could imagine a teacher telling a class at our school about the same subject.
And the scene where Jimmy started to crawl on the ice I thought was a very irresponsible thing to do and I don't think that anyone that I knew, including me, would ever do anything so irresponsible.
If I was one of Jimmy's parents, I would be very angry at him and all of his three friends. I don't think that crashing a toboggan is very funny and I don't think that he was responsible enough to have a toboggan in the first place.

Poor Jimmy! Emma certainly takes up a very moral stance to the behaviour of all the characters. She moves almost immediately to ethical values, relating the events of the story and the behaviour of the characters to how she would expect people to behave in her own world - the three older boys, Jimmy himself and in the light of what happened, Jimmy's parents.

Lee

Where Leanne enters empathetically and Emma morally into the story, Lee enters into it visually, contributing many visual details of his own to those which already exist in the text as he watches Jimmy's progress:

Writing from the inside, I am going to write as if I was watching up close.
Jimmy, with his hands in his pockets, walked along in the

snow which flooded his wellington boots. The bottom of his light blue jeans were now wet. Slowly he walked on As the snow got lower down his boots, he stopped - almost as if to think he had a fear of something.
Then he turned and started down the hill to the pond. It was 250 or so yards to a frozen pond. He looked as though he was somebody who was bullied at school. His negative mind thinking about what skills his friends had got, which Jimmy has not.
He slowly turned away and started to walk down the hill, slumping one foot after another to the ground, almost like he had concrete in his boots. He had blond hair with freckles over his nose.
I could see this by the way the characters were presented as well as the scene. It was the way the writer built up the story. His imagination helped build up mine. The writer gave out a lot of clues to what people were like and the scenes. But when I had to visualise something, the best bit was when Jimmy crept across the pond.
Jimmy, still in his wet wellingtons came up from a sitting down position with his arms surrounding his legs and bringing them up to his chest - carefully fell to his hands and knees. Behind Jimmy was a hill covered in snow and in front, a diving board with trees behind it. A layer of bricks was all you could see, till the ice was then there. A thick layer of flaky snow covered the ice, as Jimmy lay with his weight spread out as well.

Lee's own explanation of why he chose to respond 'from the inside' expands further on the pleasure he takes in visual imagination:

I found it quite easy to be an invisible presence. This is because I liked the story. I found it easy to visualise myself, since I do quite a lot in story books at home. It also makes it easier when the writing is so descriptive, for example "In some places the snow was no thicker than a finger."
Yes, being an invisible presence in the story did make it easier to write about. Otherwise you could not imagine the scene or the people so well. If you were not in the story

you would not be able to write a bit like this: "The trees were high over the pond, with branches coming over the white, freezing pond, surrounded by the thick snow, coming over the wellington boots of Jimmy."
Writing from the inside was much easier because I was writing what I visualised during the story.

Lee's comment about the author that 'his imagination helped build up mine' recalls Benton's observation [1992] that:

> 'The reader creates with the products of two imaginations, his or her own and the writer's.' [p.17]

I'm intrigued that Lee is inspired to contribute some descriptive writing of his own ('The trees were high over the pond... with the branches coming over... surrounded by thick snow...'). Throughout, his visual contribution to the story has played an important part in the reading experience.

Paul

Paul's comments are a mixture of thoughts, feelings and impressions, all of which are personally meaningful to him because he has *experienced* them and is able to refocus on what was happening inside his head as he listened now that he comes to make his response:

When I was imagining the story, I could see all the parts the writer described. I had a clear picture of the story such as when the writer talked about the hill and the toboggan and the snow on the pond. To see a good picture, I took things such as hills etc. I had seen before and fitted them in and it was just right.
When I came to the part where he crossed onto the water, I felt you'd have to be brave to do that, and when it said about a cracking noise, I was in two minds thinking if it was the ice or just the boy's imagination.
Also when the three boys were shooting down the hill, I

could feel how Jimmy was feeling. As the toboggan flew at the ice and as the toboggan took off from the edge, I could see it fly in slow motion and I was deciding if the toboggan was to hit the ice surface and just land on top of it and just skid along, or if it would hit the ice, cut through the ice and into the water - and I thought when a floor gives way or a roof, it caves in a bit but rather fast. And that's what I thought would happen to the ice that Jimmy was standing on and it would shoot from under Jimmy's feet and he'd go as well.
I could see the characters as well, with Jimmy being smallest and being scared out of his wits to go down the steep slope on the toboggan. I can also see the other three boys - fat and skinny.
In the story I wondered about a few things, such as how Jimmy decided to go onto the ice and all the dramatic stuff, and in the end he's walking on the floor and then I calmed down.

I would suggest that each of these responses reveals insights into the story text which can be acknowledged as readerly understanding, to which each reader has made a highly pertinent personal contribution.

Writing from the Outside - Robert and Vicky

Both these pupils commented on how the suggestions about what they might look for, had provided some support and helped to give them a sense of direction:

I needed these suggestions to do a piece of work well. They were very helpful. [Robert]

I found the suggestions very helpful. I need a start to my writing even if it's just one sentence to start. I found the more suggestions the more and easier I can write about stories.[Vicky]

Robert

The characters in the story came across very easily to me because I recognised them as other people I know. For example, Kit reminded me of a boy called Jack Smith because he is always trying to pin the blame on someone or something else. I think the characters came across in the way they acted.
The scenery was well [described]. I found it easy to imagine because it was explained well. They reminded me of places I know. Where I live there is a place called Foot Hill Park. In one place it is flat but in one place it is a steep hill with all trees and benches and lamp posts as described in the story.
I was sucked in at the beginning because it says that Jimmy did not like the snow and I don't like the snow much myself. I was really satisfied at the end because Jimmy had won a small piece of confidence and that was basically what the story was about.
I think there were a few flashbacks in the story when Jimmy is remembering his lesson with Miss Dixon but there was also a twist at the end because you are led to believe that the pond is filled with water but in fact it is not and there is just a layer of ice on the top.
I think there was a good climax where Jimmy is on the ice and Kit, Teddy and Pete are racing down the hill on Jimmy's sledge coming straight for the ice. I think this story was at the exact right speed for me.

Vicky

I imagine the boys to be quite young, around the age of 11/12. Quite tall except Jimmy who I saw as short, skinny and about 9 years old. I saw them with winter clothes on but tatty - eg. shirts untucked, coats on at an angle. Jimmy with short black hair all the others differently built bodies and short brown hair.
I thought this because of some of the things they said - eg. in class, one said Jimmy had really small feet, so I thought of a body to match his feet.
I also thought that because of the way they acted - eg.

Jimmy short and small because [he was] afraid of things and not quite sure of himself. The other boys are tatty and quite big built because they were ready to try anything and be typical boys.
The description of the setting really helped me picture a scene. I don't think I have ever imagined a picture in any class work as well as I did in this story. I think it was because of the detail...I pictured nearly every scene but the picture I could see most clearly was of them coming down a hill onto the pond that Jimmy had just managed to stand up on and was deciding which way to get back.
I could see it from Jimmy's place as if I was standing by his side or as him. I was looking through a gap in a short hedge about a foot high which followed the edge of the pond either way round for a couple of metres. Through this hole in the hedge and above I could see a large hill... You could see a toboggan with three boys getting in.

At the start of this chapter, I asked myself the question 'Would [pupils] lose sight of their own engagement with the story if they focused on the construction...?' In fact, Robert and Vicky have hardly stepped out of the story at all as they are still recollecting it very much as they imagined it. Their responses are still predominantly *reader*-focused.

Robert writes of how Kit's behaviour calls to mind a boy he knows and he describes in some detail a park with which he is personally familiar. Vicky describes how she visualised the story in her mind, picturing each of the characters and the moment when the boys came flying down on the sledge towards the pond.

But I think that there are elements of appreciation as well as engagement in both these responses, and that the suggestions about what to look for in the Guidelines did, to some extent act as useful reference points. Robert's

recollection of a boy he knows is linked to, or perhaps results in his observation that 'the characters came across in the way they acted'. He is also able to select an example of a flashback in the story and to appreciate the nature of the twist at the end.

Vicky comments that it is the detail in the description of the scene which has helped her to picture this story so successfully in her mind's eye. She also gives us an interesting insight into the *moving viewpoints* from which she surveys the scene:

I could see it from Jimmy's place as if I was standing by his side... I was looking through a gap in a short hedge... through this hole... and above I could see a large hill...

From an educational point of view, there is scope for further research here into exploring further how young readers can be encouraged to incorporate their own engagement with a story into a developing appreciation and understanding of its construction.

Chapter Fifteen

A Y10 story reader responds to two sets of Guidelines

The oldest group of pupils to participate in the research came from a girls' independent school. Their teacher tried out with the class two versions of the Guidelines for eliciting personally meaningful responses to the texts that they were reading, with a gap of several months between the two occasions. Subsequently she offered the following comment on their responses:

In this grade-driven environment I find it quite hard work to encourage the girls to have confidence in their own readings of a text. So often they are trying to please the teacher by giving the Right Answer, so this exercise has been refreshing and invigorating for them.

On the first occasion, they had just finished a first read through of *Animal Farm* and responded during the course of a double lesson to a set of Guidelines which I had produced for pupil readers shortly after completing the 'reference maps' for each kind of response. With these maps in mind, I had been somewhat more specific in my suggestions. They were set out as a list of questions in an attempt to address readers as directly as possible.

At this stage in the research, I was still asking readers to make both kinds of response - engaged and appreciative - looking at the way the story was written as well as looking into it. These bright 14-15 year olds seemed to take this double invitation in their stride, although they did not always respond to every question.

It was very difficult to select just one respondent from the many thoughtful and illuminating responses that I received but for reasons of space, I have chosen to comment on the responses that Laura made, to *Animal Farm* in

the first instance and then, a term later, to a short story of her own choosing.

These are the Guidelines that the girls used to respond to *Animal Farm*:

Guidelines - sixth version

TWO KINDS OF RESPONSE THAT YOU CAN MAKE TO A STORY

A) LOOKING INTO THE STORY

Do you have any feelings or thoughts about the characters, as people?

Do you have any thoughts or feelings about what happens to them?

Could you picture any moments of the story in your mind?
If so, explain what you saw as you imagined the scene, or as you imagined what was happening.

Did any questions occur to you as you read the story?
Did it make you wonder anything?

B) LOOKING AT HOW THE STORY IS WRITTEN

What did you like about the way the writer began the story or the way it ended?

What did you like about the way the characters were presented?
(eg. visual description, their speech, their thoughts, their actions)

What did you like about the way events followed on from each other - or about the 'pace' at which things happened?

What did you like about the way that the setting helped to create an effective atmosphere for the story?

Did the writer include any particularly significant details?

Did you feel to be 'inside the story', along with the characters - or 'outside the story' as an unseen spectator?

ONLY COMMENT ON ANY ASPECTS OF THE STORY THAT APPEALED TO YOU.

Laura's response to *Animal Farm*

Although Laura did not number her responses to the questions on the sheet, I have numbered them here for ease of reference in the commentary which follows.

Looking into the story

1. I think the character which I felt most for was Boxer. I liked the way he was so innocent, unthinking and hardworking but became caught up in Napoleon's bad scheme. This was probably due to his lack of thinking because he was unable to see what was going on. He believed everything Napoleon said, being totally faithful to him and never questioning him. If Boxer ever did notice that the commandments weren't quite right or he remembered the events of a story differently, he just had to be told that it was said by Napoleon himself and he would immediately accept the new order of events. This loyalty was one of the things which I think stopped him from seeing what was happening around him.
He is admirable in the way he is so devoted to his work and his two mottoes made him work harder whenever something went wrong, thinking that it was his fault for not doing enough. Although loyalty and honesty and hard work are good qualities in a person, I think Boxer has taken them to the extremes where they cause him to not see what's going on and almost work himself to death.

2. I think it is sad what happens to Boxer. It seems a shame that all his hard work on the farm, something that should have meant a good pension, caused him to be injured, and then sent to the knackers... it also seems sad that all his hard work on the windmill kept being destroyed which must have been very hard for him emotionally and just tell himself that he must work harder to build another one.

3. I can imagine the way just a few of the animals are standing together in a group, looking quite sad but smiling

at Boxer who is looking at them through the window. Then I can imagine the way Benjamin sees the writing on the side of the van and jumps about shouting at everyone what it says. The animals first look shocked, then jump up shouting at Boxer to get out. Boxer looks at them for a while, then turns and tries to kick his way out unsuccessfully. The van has started to move and the animals run after it shouting because they want Boxer back.

4. The main questions which came from the story were 'Why didn't any of the animals see that Napoleon was not a good leader?' 'Why did Snowball not attempt to come back to Animal Farm after being expelled, with defences of his own?' and 'Why didn't the animals group together against Napoleon's punishments and policies?' The answers to questions 1 and 3 could be that the animals were just too stupid to realise but the story shows that the animals suspected the commandments were different and that the pigs were breaking them. They were all just too scared to say anything because of the dogs.

Looking at how the story is written

1. I think the way the story ended was very effective because everything which the animals were fighting for (against) at the beginning of the story caused the pigs to end up just like humans so the rest of the animals haven't gained anything and we are left with the saddening picture of the pigs being indistinguishable from the humans. The story finishes at this point so we do not know what happens afterwards and it is hard to forget about it for a while after reading it.

2. I like the way the characters were similar to humans in their personalities so it was easy to understand them. All the main characters were described at the beginning so you could imagine how they would behave in certain situations. I also thought it was clever in the way the characters all changed during the story, particularly Boxer, and these changes were not just told to us but were shown by the actions of the characters.

6. I felt that I was outside the story as an 'unseen spectator', as if I was looking at them from above. I could not imagine being part of the action alongside the other animals because it was written in a way that made it seem more distant.

Some observations on Laura's response

[1] Laura has a soft spot for Boxer - as did many other members of the class. She attributes his blindness to what was going on not to repression but to loyalty. However, she is also prepared to be critical of Boxer's behaviour in taking his loyalty to such extremes. Keeping her focus on the moment that Boxer is about to be driven away to the knacker's yard [3], Linda presents us with her picture of the old workhorse looking out of the back window of the van at the animals who are 'standing together in a group'. Her picture then becomes animated as she imagines the way that they are galvanised into action once they realise the van's destination, just as it starts to move forward.

Laura's questions [4] about the animals' behaviour are confined to the story at a literal level but they move beyond such details as whether pigs can hold a gun in their trotters to more thematic issues which she then has a go at answering for herself.

When she comes to the second section, I am not sure whether she skipped from [2] to [6] because these were the only aspects of the story which appealed to her ('**Only comment on any aspects of the story that appealed to you**') or whether she simply ran out of time. Her comments on the ending, as she *looks back* at the beginning, show clearly how she has interpreted the significance of what occurs - and empathised with it:

'...it is hard to forget about it for a while after reading it.'

Laura's comment about viewpoint [6] is interesting. Where many of the girls wrote in response to the final question in the Guidelines that they felt themselves as readers to be inside the story alongside the animals - as they watched in horror, for instance, as Boxer was driven away to the knacker's yard - Laura envisages everything happening 'from above'. Maybe she takes up this position mentally because it was suggested by my phrase 'unseen spectator' (precursor to 'invisible presence') but 'because it was written in a way that made it seem more distant' would suggest that her perspective is also influenced by the way that Orwell directs the attention of the implied reader. This would be an issue well worth taking up in discussion with the group which could develop their awareness of how a narrative can offer the reader a variety of viewpoints.

Laura's response to *There Will Come Soft Rains*[1]

On this second occasion, the girls made their responses for homework. They were using the seventh version of the Guidelines for pupil readers which I have described in the previous chapter [p.274-5]. I attribute the length of their responses to the greater freedom that having a choice offered and to the unlimited (presumably) time that they could spend on their answers. Like the Y8 pupils, the girls were asked to write down the reasons for the choice they had made.

Laura explained her choice of response as follows:

I chose to write about the story 'From the Inside' because I thought the story had a message I could write about. I

[1] Bradbury, R. *There Will Come Soft Rains*, in *Twenty One great Stories*, ed. Lass and Tasman, Mentor Imprint, 1969

thought the meaning of the story was much more important than the way he wrote the story, which was simple and calm but there was not a lot of twists or unusual methods. *I also prefer writing from the inside as I prefer to read a story trying to understand what it means rather than looking at it technically.* [my italics]

Throughout, she is engaged with what is happening from her own point of view as a reader, as she expresses her thoughts, her feelings and her visual impressions. Her response contains many phrases which indicate her personal search for understanding as she seeks to interpret the significance of the story, such as:

'it seemed to me', 'made me wonder' [2], 'this made me think' [5], 'I then decided that it must signify' [6], 'This was when I realised' [7].

Again, I have numbered the paragraphs in Laura's extended response for ease of reference in the commentary that follows.

[1] I found this to be a particularly disturbing but fascinating short story. It may have been written in the past as a warning to man about the future, by an author who believed that man was his own enemy and could easily kill himself in pointless war. For this reason, that it is almost a prophesy, I found it to be unnerving. Even though April 28th 1985 has passed it still seems possible to me that the basics of the story could still take place, which makes me feel very unsafe, especially finding out the sudden way in which the inhabitants of this house were killed.

[2] At the beginning it seemed to me to be a very simple story about a house which can run itself, solving all the problems about cleaning and cooking while also providing entertainment like poetry and music but the second

paragraph soon told me that this was not so. After this discovery, the story becomes engrossing as we watch the house prepare breakfast and give reminders to a family obviously not living there any more, which made me wonder what could have happened to them. I wondered if people could live through a nuclear explosion, if they would die suddenly or slowly, and in the beginning it was not clear, giving me the incentive to read on and find out.

[3] When the information did come I was totally unprepared for it because it starts beautifully by describing the garden sprinkler filling 'the soft morning air with golden fountains'. It relaxes you, imagining the garden, warm in the spring with the soothing sound of the sprinkle, when suddenly you see five silhouettes in paint. When it is announced that these are shadows where people once stood, it gives quite a shock, unprepared for the horror in such a picturesque scene. Making it worse, is that you can see that these people were doing everyday relaxing things - children playing with a ball and the parents working in the garden - not knowing that a second later they would be killed. The frozen images of the family would be a ghastly and shocking sight and the way it was presented as though a camera is scanning the scene, and reporting everything it sees, without any emotion or unable to see that this was once a living family, makes it all the more sickening.

[4] I think the paragraph 'And, inside, the house was like an altar with nine thousand robot attendants, big and small, servicing, attending, singing in choirs, even though the gods had gone away and the ritual was meaningless' is a wonderful comparison because the house is just like a temple with the gods being the people living there, so the cleaning and cooking ritual the robots religiously carry out every day is useless and meaningless without the family there to appreciate it.

[5] I also found the part about the dog quite unsettling in the way it came into its home, obviously dying, went through a terrible ordeal, then just died on the carpet. It

was made horrible in the way it was described plainly and emotionless[ly], as if it was describing the way the dog might normally come in. The description of pancakes being made on the stove seemed out of place sandwiched between the wild hysterical dog and the dog frothing and dying, because it gives a comforting warm atmosphere which shows even more that there is no sympathy or even a thought that it is a sorrowful occurrence that is to happen. This made me think that without humans, the dog *would* have just been a piece of rubbish because although it was once a family pet and would have been mourned for and buried, now the family was gone there was nobody to feel emotions and sadness so to the robots it was just something to be tidied up.

[6] I found the fire at the end of the story confusing because at first I could not figure out why it happened. I then decided that it must signify the end of the human race altogether because before, even though all the humans were dead, their buildings and achievements were still around, so the fire destroying the last functioning thing made by humans would signify the very end and the forgetting of the human race. The last things that the robots said, carrying out their everyday tasks over and over again, and trying desperately to put the fire out, seemed to me to be the last attempts by humans, or by things that were made by humans to save the last signs that they were once around, as if they were clinging on to a last hope. It seemed strange that they couldn't save themselves because all the water had been used up on unimportant things like baths and washing that were never used, so the fire could overtake the house. The part where the house was dying and the robots had begun to malfunction was almost like a nightmare scene with the screeching voices, the fire burning and melting the robots and voice circuits and their usual jobs being carried out at a 'psychopathic rate'. I could just imagine chaos with the robots dashing about trying to achieve their tasks while the house flamed, smoked and crumpled around them.

[7] It seemed pathetic to me that while the last human accomplishments were being gradually destroyed, in the middle of it all was a stove making dozens of pancakes, the last thing we see before it all comes crashing down into a pile of rubble and smoke. This seems so humiliating to the human race which I think is what the author thought of man if they could be stupid enough to kill themselves in war. Although man is intelligent and can accomplish amazing things, the story makes it seem like all we have is slave machines and pancake makers and seeing the last of it all go up in smoke is a huge disappointment and an embarrassment. *It makes me think that we are looking for the wrong things and aiming for the wrong targets*, because seeing what man had to show for himself at the end, it all seemed so pointless and insignificant. This was when I realised how ironic the poem read to the absent Mrs McClellan was, because everything in that poem is true and everything in that poem happened in the story. We can assume that the human race died out through a nuclear bomb in a war and as the poem says, 'Not one will know of the war, not one will care at last when it is done.' Because if all of man is dead, then there is nobody to know that there was a war, and nobody to know that the war is over because both sides lost all their men. It is true that nobody would mind 'If mankind perished utterly' in fact it would probably be better for birds and trees if they did. And it is true that nobody would notice if they were gone. The house itself, a slave to humans, functioned perfectly without them, not even realising that they were no longer there.

[8] I was left with a strange, hollow feeling at the end, when a new day began and the single voice repeated 'Today is April 29th, 1985.' It was as if the world was carrying on without humans and had already forgotten they were ever there. I could imagine the sun rising over the ruin, silhouetting the single standing wall and as life was waking up all around it, it seemed as though the voice repeated it over and over again as a warning to us in the future, that that was the day the world continued without

us.

Commentary

In her opening paragraph [1] Laura tentatively sketches out the possible 'message' of the story:

It may have been written in the past as a warning to man about the future...

This idea is extended with increased confidence in [7] when she comes to think again about the moment when the stove is turning out pancake after pancake as the house burns down:

This seems so humiliating to the human race which I think is what the author thought of man if they could be stupid enough to kill themselves in war. Although man is intelligent and can accomplish amazing things, the story makes it seem like all we have is slave machines and pancake makers...

But Laura doesn't stop there, she pushes further to interpret the significance of this theme:

It makes me think that we are looking for the wrong things and aiming for the wrong targets.

There are many other instances of Laura's capacity for interpretation, such as the significance of the death of the dog [5] and the reason for the consuming fire [6], which at first, as she was reading the story, she couldn't 'figure out', but now that she comes to write down her response, she can come to a decision about:

...so the fire destroying the last functioning thing made by humans would signify the very end and forgetting of the human race.

This is an excellent illustration of the point that Benton and Fox make:

> 'After a text is read, we need to provide sufficient 'space' for the individual to discover, confirm and perhaps relish his own unique response... before the ideas of others... are considered.' [1985, p.109]

Laura also reveals how she experienced the story *affectively*. Her opening sentence reads:

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I found this to be a particularly disturbing but
fascinating short story.
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This neatly combines its effect on her feelings with the appeal to her intellect. Similarly, feelings and thoughts are inter-related when she is trying to define the mood of the story in [6]:

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It seemed strange that they couldn't save themselves
because all the water had been used up on unimportant
things like baths... that were never used
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and again in [7]:

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It seemed pathetic to me that while the last human
accomplishments were being gradually destroyed, in the
muddle of it all was a stove making dozens of pancakes...
```

She eventually pins down the ironic note which runs through the whole story when she comes to the reading of the poem from which the story takes its title:

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I realised how ironic the poem read to the absent Mrs
Mclellan was, because everything in that poem is true and
everything in that poem happened in the story.[7]
```

Laura selects what are for her two particularly visual moments in the story. The first is described in [3]:

It relaxes you, imagining the garden, warm in the spring with the soothing sound of the sprinkle...

Then the sight of the silhouettes 'shadows where people once stood', which shocks her in the act of reading - 'unprepared for the horror in such a picturesque scene' - especially as she experiences the 'frozen images... as though a camera is scanning the scene.'

She also at this point, visualises a flashback of her own as she imagines:

Children playing with a ball and parents working in the garden - not knowing that a second later they would be killed.

The second visual moment occurs towards the end of the story:

The part where the house was dying and the robots had begun to malfunction was almost like a nightmare scene with the screeching voices, the fire burning and melting the robots and voice circuits and their usual jobs being carried out at a "psychopathic rate". I could just imagine chaos with the robots dashing about trying to achieve their tasks while the house flamed, smoked and crumpled round them.[6]

All in all, this seems to me to be the kind of aesthetic transaction with the text of which Rosenblatt would fully approve. Laura's response combines her own thoughts, feelings and impressions with the detailed substance of the story in a way *that is personally meaningful for other readers as well as for herself*, as my commentary illustrates. Her response both illuminates and enriches the story for me as I place her virtual text against the original.

I believe that Laura has demonstrated how it is possible for a thoughtful reader to move from engagement to interpretation through focusing her

attention *in detail* on the effect that the story had on her as a reader, in a way that would satisfy the performance criteria for GCSE at the highest level. The point that I would make with an examination context in mind is twofold: she has been able to explore her response without a restrictive time barrier and she has been able to concentrate totally on what the story meant to her.

Chapter Sixteen

Assessing pupils as story readers

I have described throughout this thesis how Rosenblatt's distinction between making an aesthetic and an efferent transaction with a literary text has become central to my understanding of the difference, for a reader, between an approach which involves engagement and one which focuses on the text solely as an object for analysis. For a story to become *personally* meaningful, what the reader 'makes' of it must engage her own imagination in conjunction with the words on the page as the following observations from response theorists clearly indicate:

> 'As the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text... he sets the work in motion and so sets himself in motion too.' [Iser, 1978]

> 'To speak of the meaning of the work is to tell a story of the reading.' [Cutler, 1983]

> 'The literary work of art comes into being through the reader's attention to what the text activates within him.' [Rosenblatt, 1985]

In the preceding three chapters, I have turned my attention from *teachers* as readers of their pupils' stories to *pupils* as story readers in order to illustrate the variety of ways in which they, too, were able to express responses to texts that were personally meaningful with the help of my Guidelines.

As I move towards the completion of my investigation, I now want to look more closely in this chapter at the current system of external Tests and Examinations for Reading , for English and English Literature , in order to

find out:

a) to what extent the Examination Papers (and in the case of GCSE, Course work) *offer pupils opportunities* as story readers to make an aesthetic or an efferent response;

and

b) to what extent stated Aims, Assessment Objectives, Mark Schemes and Performance Criteria or Level Descriptors *direct the attention of the examiners* to aesthetic aspects of pupils' responses. In the case of GCSE, I shall also consider comments in the Examiners' Reports.

For a time, I was inclined to call this chapter:

'**W**hat **Y**ou **S**ee **I**s **W**hat **Y**ou **G**et' - **but who decides what to look for?**

If pupil readers are expected to extract relevant bits of information, like 'plums in a pie' as Protherough [1983] remarks, or if they are expected to comment on a writer's handling of narrative *unrelated* to their own engagement with the story text, then the assessor's stance will be largely efferent. If, on the other hand, the assessor wishes to consider how the reader engages with the story, then the stance that s/he adopts to what the pupil has written is likely to be predominantly aesthetic.

We must also bear in mind that whatever stance predominates in our examination systems will tend to predominate in our classrooms also, for as Claggett [1996] remarks: 'assessment whether we like it or not, drives curriculum'. I explore the knock-on effects of our current approaches to the assessment of story reading and story writing in my final chapter.

Before I come to the actual test and examination Papers, let me set out in more detail what aspects of a pupil's capacity for response as a story reader

are likely to be taken into account depending on the kind of stance that an assessor chooses to adopt.

Taking an aesthetic stance:

To what aspects of a pupil's response can this stance draw attention?

a) It can draw attention to a pupil's own thoughts about the story.

b) It can draw attention to a pupil's own feelings about the story.

c) It can draw attention to the visual or other impressions which the story has evoked in a pupil's mind.

d) It can draw attention to a pupil's interpretation of the story, of its themes and values.

e) It can draw attention to how a pupil relates her experience of the story to her appreciation of its construction .

Taking an efferent stance:

To what aspects of a pupil's response can this stance draw attention?

a) It can draw attention to the pupil's *content* analysis of the story.

b) It can draw attention to the pupil's *structural* analysis of the story.

c) It can draw attention to the pupil's *linguistic* analysis of the story.

d) It can draw attention to the pupil's *cultural* analysis of the story.

e) It can draw attention to the pupil's *historical* analysis of the story.

f) It can draw attention to the *secretarial aspects* of a pupil's written response.

I shall now investigate the extent to which recent English Tests for pupils at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3, and GCSE examinations for English and English Literature at the end of Key Stage 4, offer pupils on the one hand, and examiners on the other, an opportunity to approach story reading from

an aesthetic or an efferent point of view. At the time that I was collecting the data for this chapter, the 1997 English Tests for Key Stage 3 and the GCSE examinations had not taken place. Accordingly, in these instances I have drawn on 1996 materials.

English Tests for Key Stage 2, Summer 1997

The Reading Test

Opportunities for pupils to take an aesthetic or an efferent approach

The booklet for this test included a folk tale and two articles. One article offered information about 'monsters of the deep' and the other, information about four mythical sea creatures. The response to these non-literary articles in Section 2 of the Paper appropriately required information retrieval, but so, largely, did the 19 questions about the story in Section 1. The format for response to *The Asrai* is that of a traditional comprehension test. Readers are required to comb through the story in order to extract the correct information, mainly in the form of single words or phrases.

Only three questions invite the reader to offer any thoughts of her own:

14. Choose **three** of the words below which best describe the Asrai...
    Beside each one explain why you have chosen it.

18. Many traditional folk tales have messages.
    What do you think this story is trying to tell us?
    Explain as fully as you can.

19. Did you enjoy reading this story?
    Explain your opinion as fully as you can, referring to the story.

For this final answer, pupils were given a box with a space for six lines of comment inside it. I cannot help feeling, however, that by the time any child

arrived at this final question after searching for the right answers to most of the preceding eighteen, any impulse to write even a short response about her enjoyment of the tale would have quite faded away.

No question invited any reference to the visual or other sensory impressions which the story may have evoked. Thus in assessing a reader's response to this folk tale, what Benton [1992] calls the substance of the story world and the voices which communicate it, are ignored completely.

Opportunities for examiners to give credit for an aesthetic or an efferent approach

In the Mark Scheme[1], the focus was largely on the 'correct answer', 'finding evidence' by quoting words and phrases culled directly from the text. Two questions (for 1 mark each) required 'deduction of motive', one question (for 3 marks) required an explanation of why three descriptive words had been chosen by the reader, another (for 3 marks) required an interpretation of 'the underlying message' and for 1 mark readers were asked to respond generically, by explaining one way in which folk tales differ from other types of story. Throughout the Mark Scheme, examiners were given either the actual information to be extracted from the tale or brief exemplar answers. To be fair, these examples were accompanied by the caveat:

> Many children will, however, have different ways of wording an acceptable answer...' [p.1]

but nevertheless the whole emphasis of the test is on the extraction of information.

There are no Assessment Objectives or 'Level Descriptors' for story reading in the 1997 KS2 Tests. Instead, examiners are informed that the Mark

[1] Dee, 1997, *English Tests MARK SCHEMES*, KS2

Scheme which I have just described 'indicates the criteria on which judgments should be made', presumably by referring to: 'the focus of each question' such as *'finding evidence'* or *'deduction'* or *'characteristics of this text type'*.[p.6]

Predominantly efferent expectations

There can be no doubt, that currently at Key Stage 2, the response to a story that pupils are invited to make and that they are given credit for is predominantly efferent, in the sense that it requires information retrieval rather than imaginative engagement.

English Tests for Key Stage 3, Summer 1996

Paper 1

Opportunities for pupils to take an aesthetic or an efferent approach

The passage that was chosen to assess a pupil's response to narrative in the 1996 KS3 English Test comes from *Polar Dream* by Helen Thayer [1993], an autobiographical account of her journey to the North Pole. It recalls her first unexpected encounter with a polar bear and her two cubs. Helen vividly describes her feelings in a silent running commentary as she follows the advice that she recalls for frightening bears away:

With a pounding heart I grabbed my loaded gun...' 'I frantically tried to remember...' '...my nerves were as tight as violin strings and my heart could have been heard at base camp.' 'My hands were shaking...', '...the mind-numbing fear that still gripped me...

Small details evoke a picture of the arctic setting as Helen prepares to strike camp:

pulling the freezing tent poles out of the ice', 'purposefully plodding through the rough shore ice towards me' , 'the flare burning a bright red on the white ice.

More descriptive details paint a clear picture of the mother bear:

Her head moved slightly... but she didn't stop., ...she fixed her tiny black eyes on Charlie', ...she plodded north with her two new cubs trotting behind her, their snow-white coats contrasting with their mother's creamy, pale yellow colour.

As well as her feelings, Helen records her thoughts:

Even before I looked, I knew what I would see.... I could sense her concern about Charlie's snarling. ... The whole episode... seemed years long.. Now I knew that I could stand up to a bear in the wild... ... I was thankful for Charlie's warning.

She also records a blow by blow account of what happens:

I heard a deep, long growl coming from the depths of Charlie's throat., I unclipped Charlie from his ice anchor... I led him to the sled..., I fired a warning shot..., On she came., I dropped another flare two feet in front of her...
and so on.

Clearly, there is plenty of scope here for pupils to take an aesthetic approach and to respond with engagement as they describe the thoughts, feelings and impressions that Thayer's description *evoked for them* as imaginatively they re-create the whole experience.

However, the questions side-step any specific scope for a 'personally meaningful' reader-response by focusing on how *the writer* builds up and sustains a sense of danger about the event in Question 1 and again by focusing on an explanation of *the writer's* 'mixed thoughts and feelings' in Question 2. Attention is directed to the extraction of details which are relevant to *the writer's* 'sense of danger' and to her 'mixed thoughts and

feelings', but how *the reader* experienced the situation is left out of the transactional equation.

Opportunities for examiners to give credit for an aesthetic or an efferent approach

The **Assessment Objectives** for the first question read:

This question assesses pupils' ability to understand and respond to:
* the theme of the passage;
* *the writer's* presentation of character;
* *the writer's* choice of language;
* the development of the plot. [p.21]

The **Assessment Objectives** for the second question read:

This question assesses the pupil's ability to understand and respond to:
* implied and explicit ideas
* how *the writer's* choice of language affects her meaning. [p.29]

[my italics]

The problem is that the first question with its focus on how the 'build up of danger' is achieved offers only limited scope for a reader to express her own reactions to the situation which a more aesthetic approach could have encouraged. This is also the case when it comes to understanding 'implied or explicit ideas' in relation to 'an explanation of the writer's thoughts and feelings'. Surely a pupil's ability to understand the nature of the experience that Helen Thayer describes, must depend in part on her own ability to imagine the whole encounter.

The Mark Scheme commentary on the exemplar responses to both Questions for an 'above Level 7' assessment gives mixed signals to the

examiners. While focusing on the writer's 'style', it would appear to confirm that 'good' responses do involve, if only indirectly, the reader's engagement with and interpretation of what happened as the comments which I have italicised indicate:

Commentary on a response to Question 1 - Example 6
'This response focuses immediately on the style of the passage. The relaxed opening is noted as is the change to a much more tense style when Charlie spots the polar bear. *A perceptive point* is made about Helen's initial obliviousness to the danger, making her seem 'much more vulnerable'. The juxtaposition of Helen's movements and the bear's reactions... is commented on and the effective use of decreasing distances *which give the reader 'a much clearer view of what is happening'*. There is recognition of the build up of tension *as the reader waits for the bear to move*... Charlie's dual role both as defender of Helen and provoker of the bear is commented on. These are features of an above Level 7 performance.' [p.20]

Commentary on a response to Question 2 - Example 12
'This response shows *a full appreciation of Helen's thoughts and feelings and their mixed nature*. From the first sentence the pupil is able to focus on the contrasts inherent in Helen's description of this experience and also on the strength of her feelings. *There is recognition of the great danger of the expedition... but also the awe inspired in Helen by the episode.* The pupil notes that Helen responds to both the 'power' and the 'gentleness' of the bear and *there is evidence of personal response in the final two sentences. ... This shows an appreciation of all aspects of Helen's feelings* and therefore merits the award of above Level 7.' [my italics] [p.28]

Because the writer, in this instance, is also the central character in her own story (as was also the case in some of the children's stories) there is an ambivalence here about focusing on Helen Thayer's formulation of her experience and, more directly, on the experience itself, which allows more

scope for an aesthetic 'reader-response' than might otherwise have been the case.

The Extension Paper

Opportunities for pupils to take an aesthetic or an efferent approach

Strictly speaking, neither of the passages for the Reading Test on this Paper are fiction but both, like *Polar Dream*, are autobiographical. Readers are presented with the skating excerpt from *The Prelude,* by Wordsworth, and a similar excerpt from Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie*. Both passages offer scope for imaginative engagement on the part of the reader, although, with the exception of the final instruction, the required responses again tend to be *writer* rather than *reader* oriented:

Compare the way the two writers describe their experiences.

You should consider:
*the writer's choice of detail and language;
*the ways they express their feelings;
*the ways in which the passages end;
*which passage you prefer and why

Opportunities for examiners to give credit for an aesthetic or an efferent approach

Credit for evidence of personal response is implied in two of the three Assessment Objectives:

engage with ideas and themes in literature;
sustain and develop *interpretations of texts*, and support opinions by reference to them. [my italics] [p.15]

The other Assessment Objective is more analytic, although if it were linked to the reader's engagement with either of the texts it could involve a personal component as well:

understand how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices to achieve their effects.[p.15]

The *effects* of each text also receive a reference in the Performance Criteria for Levels 7 and 8, thus allowing for credit to be given for an aesthetic response at those high Levels, as presumably any discussion of effects are best related to the reader's own response.

The Criteria for 'EN' or 'exceptional performance' refer directly to 'personal response', along with the requirement that:

'Pupils handle complex ideas and interpret each text effectively...

[p.15]

Similarly, the commentary for the 8+ exemplar response, observes that:

There is also a sense of personal response... which clearly *shows full engagement* with the texts. [p.14]

GCSE English and English Literature Examinations,1996

The Examining Boards

The opportunities for pupils to respond as story readers in the GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 are complicated by the fact that there are five different Examining Boards, each of which offers separate syllabuses for English and for English Literature. There is also a system of differentiation within each syllabus, which requires separate Papers to be set for Standard or Foundation Tier candidates and for those taking the Higher Tier examination.

I have chosen, therefore, to focus on the opportunities for pupils to take an aesthetic or an efferent approach to story reading - it. responding to works of fiction - offered by one Board, MEG, in 1996, for its English Syllabus [Code

1510] and for its English Literature Syllabus A [Code 1512].

From *the pupils' point of view*, the extent to which they are given scope to respond aesthetically to the texts which they have studied and to unseen pieces, depends on the phrasing of the questions in the Papers.

From *a teacher's point of view*, the additional information provided by the Examiner's Report is likely to influence how the next set of candidates will be encouraged to respond.

From *an examiner's point of view*, there is a bewildering variety of 'assessment objectives', 'attainment targets', 'marking criteria', 'level descriptions' and 'grade descriptions or descriptors' provided in the 1992 English Orders to take into consideration.

I have drawn upon each of these sources of information in my analysis of the opportunities that pupils were given to respond aesthetically to unseen and to set texts along with the stance that examiners were encouraged to take.

MEG,1996, ENGLISH [1510]

The kinds of response that examiners would be looking for were set out variously in the Syllabus, in the Aims and Assessment Objectives, in the Mark Schemes for each question, in the overall Level Descriptors and in the Examiner's Report. I have not grouped these materials together under 'Opportunities for examiners to give credit for an aesthetic approach' as I did for the English Tests at KS2 and 3, but commented on them in the sequence in which they occur, before and after pupils have taken the exam.

The Syllabus

Aims

The stated 'aims' for reading in the Syllabus booklet were very general, but with one clear reference to the kind of efferent approach which the term 'study' often takes for granted:

> the ability to read, understand and respond to all types of writing and *develop information retrieval strategies* for the purposes of study.
> [my italics] [p.1]

Assessment Objectives

The 1996 MEG Syllabus stated that:

> The Assessment Objectives... match the statutory Attainment Targets and Statements of Attainment... Each objective identifies an attribute of strand of attainment referred to within each Attainment Target (AT). [p.1]

This statement refers to the 1992 Orders for English on which all the Boards were required to base their 1996 Syllabuses.

Coursework

Apart from a reference in the English Syllabus that Course work should contain evidence to show... the *range* of reading and the *study of whole works of literature*, there was no indication of the kind of response to fictional texts that examiners would be expected to give credit for.

The Papers

Papers **1** and **3** related to 'Non-Literary and Media Texts' and did not, therefore, involve any responses to fictional texts. Papers **2** and **4** were

designated 'Literature' and involved both story reading and story writing.

Papers 2 and 4

The Syllabus for English stated that in Section A, candidates:

will be expected to refer to the texts in support of their insights and opinions and to *give sustained evidence of personal response*.
[my italics] [p.6 and p.7]

In addition, in Section B on both Papers:

A choice of tasks will be given *to elicit an imaginative and creative response to the material.* [my italics] [p.6 and p.7]
(But note my comments, later, on how these tasks are to be assessed.)

Paper 2, Standard Tier, June 1996

The Questions

Opportunities for pupils to take an aesthetic approach

The Paper was divided into two Sections, with opportunities, apparently, in both sections for pupils to receive credit for an engaged, experiential and imaginative approach. In Section A the pre-release material involved an excerpt from a novel about a physically handicapped young girl called Shona who is about to face the trauma of going away to school, along with Stephen Spender's poem:
'*My parents kept me from children who were rough...*' and an unseen excerpt from another novel, also on the theme of bullying and vulnerability.

In Question 1 pupils were invited to:

Explain...what it is like to be Shona.

There were suggestions for aspects of the child's experience which they might like to consider, along with the reminder:

Remember to explain how particular words and phrases *have helped you to understand her feelings*. [my italics]

Clearly there were opportunities here for readers to draw on their own thoughts and feelings as these had been evoked by the text, although the Examiner's Report commented that:

Candidates who changed the question to 'If I were Shona' and imaginatively described how they would have felt in her position failed to demonstrate a close reading of the passage... [p.8]

I do not find myself in disagreement with this observation, recognising that the text plays an equal part in any aesthetic transaction along with the thoughts and feelings that the reader brings to it. It was good to read in the Report, however, that:

Examiners were heartened by the ready sympathy for Shona that emerged at almost all levels.... [p.8]

In Question 2, pupils were required to comment on the Spender poem in relation to a previously unseen narrative excerpt about another child who was bullied by a classmate as being too bright for her own good. The ill treatment of both the central characters had to be taken into consideration:

Write about:

- what happens to them.
- why you think they are treated like this.
- how they react.
- your feelings towards each victim.

Again, there was clearly scope here, not just for a retelling but for readers to explain what they 'made' of each text. The Examiner's Report stated that:

This task was testing powers of comprehension, and *the ability to think*

behind the text to find reasons for behaviour. [my italics] [p.8]

Clearly this involved readers in interpreting the significance of what happened in the light of their own understanding as they paid careful attention to the details of each text and in this respect it was inviting an aesthetic response.

Section B

This section required pupils to spend about 45 minutes responding to one of three questions - each of which was designed:

to *see how well you can use your imagination* to extend and develop what you have read. [my italics]

This appeared to me to be an interesting and welcome variation on commenting specifically on the narrative techniques of the author. For a reader to place the same characters in a situation that grows out of the text, surely she will need to have experienced their present story for herself, through empathy or sympathy, through her visual impressions of that secondary world and through her interpretation of the significance of what has already occurred.

However, when I came to look at the Mark Scheme for Section B in Paper 2 and in Paper 4, I was disappointed to find that the focus of assessment was directed almost entirely to the pupil's skills *as a writer* and hardly at all to what she had made of the original text *as a reader*.

Comments in the Examiner's Report on all three Questions in this section seemed to be at odds with the Mark Scheme in giving credit for evidence of sensitive and engaged reading of the texts on which this extended writing is

based:

Candidates should... ensure that the developments in their narratives are likely and the characterisation is convincing. [p.8-9]

Good answers:

showed sensitive awareness and deepest sympathy [p.9]

or:

a keen interest in Stephen's feelings about his parents [p.9]

or:

Good answers reflected Lesley's internal debate... not all had a happy ending and most successfully aroused the reader's sympathy. [p.9]

The Mark Scheme

A paltry 6 marks out of 30 were allocated for reading response and the Level Descriptors for 'reading' referred to 'an understanding of the **facts** of the passage' [Level 7, p.8] as though any relation to the story on which this extension is to be based, had suddenly become an exercise in information retrieval.

In contrast, Section A focused primarily on the assessment of pupils as readers. It carried 40 marks, 34 of which related to the candidate's reading response and 6 to her writing skills. Criteria for both the set tasks in Section A contained references to 'personal engagement' and 'interpretation' [p.2 and 4] as did the Descriptors for Tasks 1 and 2 at Level 7, the highest level that Standard Tier candidates could achieve:

Task 1

Answers show *considerable understanding* of her [Shona's] difficulties and feelings...*engagement* with the task, answers clearly relevant to include *some interpretation of her range of feelings* amply supported by

textual reference and quotation. [my italics] [p.3]

Task 2

Answers *show a good understanding* of character, attitude and relationships... There will be some clear attempts to explain people's actions. Answers clearly relevant, amply supported by reference and/or quotation, and *showing informed sympathy*. [my italics] [p.6]

Paper 4, Higher Tier June,1996

Like Paper 2, this Paper was also divided into two Sections with a similar Mark Scheme which gave the same higher proportion of marks to reading response (English Orders, EN) in Section A and to writing skills (English Orders, EN) in Section B. For candidates expecting to reach Level 6 or above, there was more reading material but the nature of the questions was approximately the same as for the Standard Tier Literature Paper.

On this occasion, the pre-release material involved a short story by Doris Lessing and a poem by Norman Nicholson. The unseen text was a poem by Vernon Scannell. Consequently, although both poems, of course, call for an aesthetic response as described by Langer [1953] and Rosenblatt [1978], I shall confine my comments to the questions which require a response to fiction.

The Questions

Opportunities for pupils to take an aesthetic approach

Section A, Question 1

Question 1 involved responding to a short story by Doris Lessing called *Flight*. Candidates were asked to:

Describe Grandad's feelings about Alice, Steven and Lucy, and how his feelings change during the course of the story

On the face of it, this could involve no more than a fairly straightforward exercise in information retrieval, but the second instruction gives the task greater depth and potential for making an aesthetic response to the story:

In your account, explain how the title *'Flight'* and the language of the story *help you to understand his feelings*. [my italics]

The story is a powerful one, in which the grandfather is initially reluctant to come to terms with the fact that his grand-daughter whom he still regards with delighted pleasure as an innocent and carefree child, will shortly be getting married and moving away from him into a harsher grown-up world. He schools himself into coming to terms with letting her go and at the conclusion of the story, it is she who is left grieving at his signal that she is free to move on to the next stage of her life. The old man keeps racing pigeons, and throughout the telling, there are literal and metaphorical references to caged-in security and liberation into flight. It is the understanding and the deployment of these images in describing the grandfather's relationship to his daughter, his grand-daughter and her young man, to which the question relates. Thus it offers considerable scope for an insightful, aesthetic response.

The Examiner's Report commented:

The Doris Lessing story had sufficient quality in its themes and style to stimulate the best candidates into producing some really excellent analytical and imaginative writing, while the less able responded to it with understanding and evident enjoyment. ... Higher level candidates were also able to explore the more subtle nuances [of the grandfather's feelings]. They described both his selfish desire to prolong the pleasure Alice's youthful charm gave him and his genuine concern that she should enjoy the freedom of childhood as long as possible. ... It was gratifying to discover how many candidates had a

clear understanding of how the title *'Flight'* drew attention to the symbolic use of the birds to represent Grandad's desire to 'imprison' Alice as his possession (or keep her longer in the sheltered world of irresponsible childhood) and later to release her into the 'freedom' of marriage and adult life. [p.10-11]

The Mark Scheme

All three criteria given at the commencement of the Mark Scheme could apply to an aesthetic response:

1. Understanding of Grandad's feelings... and how these feelings change during the story.
2. Extent and quality of textual reference to support the account of the feelings.
3. The validity and subtlety of the interpretation of the title. [p.2]

Examiners were instructed:

Candidates may interpret the title in various ways. Give credit for any explanation which is consistent with the facts and *the spirit of the story*. [my italics] [p.3]

The mark/level descriptions which are to be used as an overall impression to allot the final mark move from a 'basic understanding' for Level 6, to an understanding of the story's full significance at the highest Level, which presumably requires empathic insight as well as sensitive interpretation.

The description for a Level 10 response reads:

A full, detailed and subtle account of Grandad's feelings about Alice, Steven and Lucy, showing very clearly when and how they change. Criterion 2 is fully met by well chosen references and quotations with accompanying comment where appropriate. The candidate very clearly *understands the significance of the title and explores this idea and/or the language of the story in detail and with considerable subtlety*.

[my italics][p.5]

This goes beyond an arm's length analysis. Considerable subjectivity is required on the part of the reader if the significance of the title in relation to the old man's feelings is to be fully appreciated and explored. Interestingly, there is no suggestion that the response should or could take the form of a *cultural* analysis, exploring the gender issues which are certainly a feature of the story.

To make a final observation, although the reader's visual impressions are never explicitly mentioned, I would suggest that images of the old man cradling his favourite pigeon, imprisoning it in the confined space of a small box, and finally taking it out again to watch it soar away into the untrammelled spaces of the evening sky, are all crucial to that internalisation of the story which becomes the reader's virtual text - the only kind of text as Bruner would have it, which is capable of interpretation.

The one approach to assessment for this question which is indubitably efferent, is the allotment of 6 marks out of 30 for:
'Paragraphs and organisation.
Syntax and grammar.
Punctuation.
Vocabulary. [p.10]

Section B, Question 3

This question gave candidates the opportunity to:
Write a story about Alice and Steven's wedding day.
Again, the potential for revealing an aesthetic involvement with the original story in the way relationships on this crucial day are depicted (between Alice

and her Grandad, Alice and her husband, Alice and her mother, the mother and her old father) is exciting and wide-reaching. The pupils' stories could indicate a great deal about the writer's understanding and appreciation of '*Flight*.'

The Examiner's Report comments:
At their best candidates showed themselves capable of writing sensitively and inventively, using the texts as stimuli to narrative... The best answers showed a subtle understanding of the complexities of both Grandad's and Alice's feelings, developed Lucy's manner and personality convincingly and enlarged on the ambiguities at the end of the story. [p.12]

But again only a maximum of 6 marks is allotted for stories which are:

detailed, consistent and subtle [which] show a comprehensive grasp of the facts of the passage and develops other aspects of it in a wholly convincing and imaginative way. [Mark Scheme, p.12]

And again, as in the exact same wording for the Standard Tier responses to Section B, I am puzzled as to why a complex understanding of the *meaning* of this story, upon which the extension is to be based, should be reduced in this Grad grind kind of way to a recollection of 'the *facts*' as though the story from which the pupil was required to extract them is of little consequence.

The Level/Mark Descriptions for which 24 marks out of 30 are allotted for answers in Section B, focus on the 'writing' as though it had little to do with offering a *story* to a prospective audience and even less with:

how well you can use your imagination to extend and develop what you have read.

In common with all writing assessments relating to the English Orders, the

focus is efferent, based on the 'evidence' provided by the passage of the writer's 'skills' - it. the ability to write in complex as well as simple sentences, to use language precisely and correctly and to be 'error free'.

Level 7: The *structures* may be fairly simple and *errors* may occur when greater complexity is attempted. ... *Vocabulary* may lack richness and 'exactness'... Overall the writing will show *competence and good development of skills.* [my italics]

Level 8: *Based on accuracy* narratives are relevant and may achieve poignancy or excitement or illustrate a moral. ... The piece may be a little naive or over-written but produces in the reader a *feeling of competence and security*. [my italics]

Level 9: Apart from an occasional 'first draft' slip, *the work is error free.* Skill is shown in choosing *the right vocabulary* for a particular effect and there is *evidence of a large and varied vocabulary.* The candidate shows flexibility in selecting the appropriate tone.
[my italics]

Level 10: The writing is *clear and precise* and shows skills characteristic of mature literature. ... There is no doubt about the high level of *linguistic and intellectual development* shown.[my italics]
[Mark Scheme, p.13]

MEG,1996, ENGLISH LITERATURE, SYLLABUS A [1512]

The Syllabus

Aims

The aims for reading in the *English Literature* Syllabus for both Tiers were more explicit than the mere 'respond to literature' of the *English* Syllabus. But alas, there was only one reference to the personal significance that literary texts may hold for the reader:

The Syllabus is designed to give candidates opportunities to explore their literary interests and encourage them to develop:
* the ability to read, understand, and respond to all types of literary

text, to appreciate the way authors achieve their effects and to develop information-retrieval strategies for the purposes of literary study;
* awareness of *personal*, social and cultural significance in the study of literature;
* the ability to construct and convey meaning... using correct grammar and standard English (except in contexts where non-standard forms are needed for literary purposes), matching style to audience and purpose. [my italics] [p.1]

Coursework

The requirements for the MEG English Literature course work folder also appeared to allow opportunities for pupils to take an aesthetic stance to the texts which they were studying and to make an aesthetic response, not only in writing but also using oral and visual forms of expression:

Candidates' writing must show evidence of *a personal and considered response* arising from their own serious consideration of what they have studied.
Tasks must provide opportunities for candidates to offer *evidence of engagement with and responses to texts. Written responses may be supported by evidence in visual and oral form.*
Tasks should *encourage exploratory and imaginative approaches* as well as critical and evaluative comment. [my italics]

Paper 1A and 2A

The stated format in the 1996 Syllabus for each Tier Paper was the same. In each case, the first question on all the set texts was based on a selected passage and pupils had to respond to at least one passage-based question. They were also required to respond to at least one drama text and at least one prose [novel] text. A response to poetry in the examination could thus be avoided, although I note that from 1998 a response to all three genres will be compulsory.

The Papers

Paper 1A, Standard Tier, June 1996

The Questions

Opportunities for pupils to take an aesthetic approach

It would be tedious to take examples from all five set texts so I have chosen to select from two only, *I'm the King of the Castle* by Susan Hill and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Muriel Taylor. There were three choices of question or task for each text, of which the first was related to the given passage. With one exception [Qu.11] , the reader's own response was explicitly invited.

I'm the King of the Castle

4. Explain the situation in which the two boys find themselves here. What do you learn about their characters from what they do and say?

5. Which two events in the novel would *you* choose as best showing how cruel children can be? Show why you chose them.

6. What do *you* imagine Hooper would do and say when he returns to school at the end of the book?

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

10. What different feelings about Jeremy's gift do *you* see in this passage from Stacey, T.J., Papa - and why do *you* think their feelings were different?

11. Why is Mr Morrison so important to the Logans?
You might like to write about: his character, his past history, his role in the Logan household.

12. What do *you* think are the most important lessons Mary and David Logan teach Cassie in this novel?

The Examiner's Report

For both Tiers the Report commented that:

This year's papers have found candidates *to be engaging with the texts in a personal way*, showing both enjoyment and understanding.

[my italics]

This would appear to approve of pupils who have made a personally meaningful response to what they have read.

The Mark Scheme - Level Descriptors applicable to **both** Tiers

Every descriptor from Levels 5-9 contained some explicit reference to personal response:

Level 5
stating *a direct personal response* with some attempt to explain it.
Level 6
show a reasonably sustained understanding of narrative and character, and respond to these *in a clearly personal way*, with some supporting reasons and evidence.
Level 7
The *personal response* should be clearly communicated and supported.
Level 8
Narrative and character material should be firmly within a framework of *personal viewpoint*.
Level 9
An answer may be expected to handle matters of narrative and character with fluency and clear evidence of selectivity *to support a relevant personal viewpoint*. ...The response should be sensitive, thoughtful and sustained, whatever its form (critical analysis; impersonation; emotional response).
Level 10 includes everything mentioned for **Level 9** plus:
It may be also expected to reveal an element of evaluation.

Interestingly this final descriptor also included the following reminder:

...never forget that it is essentially a **literary** response we are looking

for - good 'English' qualities are not a substitute for genuine literary response, and *a strong literary response must not be missed or undervalued for lack of high level linguistic ability*. [my italics]

From the consistent references to *personal response*, this would appear to recognise that taking an aesthetic stance is an appropriate form of 'literary' response.

Paper 2A, Higher Tier, June 1996

The Questions

Opportunities for pupils to take an aesthetic approach

I have just indicated how the higher Level Descriptors which apply to this Paper as well as to Paper 1A, place a consistent emphasis on personal response. I shall take the questions set for this Tier on the same two novels as for Paper 1A to illustrate the opportunities they offer.

I'm the King of the Castle

4. Explore the dialogue and the action in this passage. Do *you* find the boys' behaviour surprising or predictable?
5. How much do *you* think Warings, Mr Hooper's house, contributes to Kingshaw's unhappiness? Support your ideas with detailed reference.
6. How do *you* imagine Mr Hooper proposes marriage to Mrs Kingshaw and how do you think she answers?

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

10. In what ways does the passage show *you* the impact the visit has on the Logan children?
What effect does the passage have on you?
11. Why is Mr Morrison an important character in this novel?
12. Imagine you are Cassie. What would *you* say are the most important lessons your parents taught you about survival in a white person's world?

Again, the way the questions were phrased invited a *reader* response which took into account what the reader 'made' of the text. It not only allowed for, but invited the kind of response that I have been seeking to elicit with my Guidelines.

Conclusions

I stated at the beginning of this chapter that I wanted to look more closely at the current system of external Tests and Examinations for English and English Literature in the curriculum in order to find out:

a) to what extent the Examination Papers (and in the case of GCSE, Course work) offer pupils opportunities as story readers to make an aesthetic or an efferent response;

and

b) to what extent stated Aims, Assessment Objectives and Performance Criteria or Level Descriptors direct the attention of the examiners to aesthetic or efferent aspects of pupils' responses.

Opportunities for pupils to respond to fictional texts aesthetically

In every case, the ***texts*** offered plenty of opportunity for pupils to take an aesthetic stance and to express an aesthetic response. However, the way that the ***questions*** were phrased in the KS2 and 3 SATs invited a predominantly efferent approach, most strikingly at the primary stage, by requiring mainly information retrieval, but also at KS3 by directing attention to the *writer's* handling of the narrative with little direct reference to its effect on the *reader*.

However, the commentaries in the KS3 Mark Scheme and the Assessment Objectives for the Extension Paper which refer to 'engagement' and to

'interpretation', do allow for the examiners to give credit for an aesthetic as well as an analytic response, *especially at the higher levels*. Strangely, though, the only direct reference to 'personal response' occurs in the Level Descriptor for 'exceptional performance' on the Extension Paper. There are *no references* to the reader's visual impressions in relation to any of the texts in either the 2 and 3 SATs or in any of the GCSE Papers.

In 1996 at GCSE level, in both the MEG English and English Literature Papers, pupils were invited to make responses which directly involved them as readers: 'Why do *you* think they are treated like this' 'What different feelings... do *you* see' 'What do *you* think are the most important lessons...' and so forth. All the Level Descriptors from 5-9 in the English Literature Mark Scheme included some reference to personal response, suggesting that there was plenty of opportunity for examiners to give credit to pupils who took an aesthetic stance. Comments in the Examiners' Reports for that year confirm that this was so.

However, the instruction in Section B on the English Papers 2 and 4, 'to see how well you can use your imagination *to extend and develop what you have read*' was misleading in giving an impression that the ability to read a text aesthetically would be rewarded. Examiners were directed to assess this question chiefly (and efferently) as a *writing* task which provided information about the pupil's writing skills.

All in all, it would seem that the more advanced the 'level' at which pupils are assessed for their responses to literature, the more opportunity there is for making an aesthetic response, especially one which relates the reader's engagement with the story in some detail to an appreciation of its

construction. Pupils who have been encouraged to respond in the way suggested by my Guidelines would not be disadvantaged, in fact quite the reverse!

Looking ahead

Before an optimistic note creeps in too strongly however, I have in front of me a chart which summarises the 1998 English and English Literature Syllabuses for all the GCSE Boards, including MEG, to be implemented in all taught courses from September, 1996. In the **English** examination, Course work assignments to be assessed for Reading will count for only 10% of the total marks (15% for WJEC) and only one of those assignments will offer the opportunity for pupils to make a response to fiction.

There may be *no opportunities* on the Examination Papers for English for pupils to make a personal response to any of the literature that they have read. Most writing tasks will be focused on writing which 'argues, persuades, instructs, explains or analyses' in conformity with the new clustering for all kinds of writing set out in the 1995 GCSE Regulations and Criteria produced by SCAA:

* explore, imagine, entertain
* inform, explain, describe
* argue, persuade, instruct
* analyse, review, comment

MEG maintain that there will be an opportunity in Section B of Papers 2 and 4 of the English examination, for responses which 'explore, imagine, entertain'. But if these are assessed primarily for writing skills as they are in the 1996 Papers, then little credit will be given for the candidates' personal response to the original literary texts on which their writing is based.

In all the **English Literature** examinations, there will also be one opportunity only, to respond to fiction in the Coursework Folder and one further opportunity in the Examination Paper. In future, it will be compulsory to answer a question on all three literary genres, including poetry, where previously *two* responses to either the novel or drama were possible. There is also a greater emphasis in the 1998 Literature Syllabuses on cultural and historical analysis and on comparisons between texts thus reducing the opportunities for personal response or for an aesthetic approach to the assessment of pupils as story readers.

A dissonance between the reduction in *opportunities* for responding aesthetically to texts and increased references to aesthetic forms of response in *the stated criteria*

I cannot help observing that this drastic reduction in the opportunities for pupils to respond (or to be assessed for responding) aesthetically to works of fiction, does seem to be at odds with fresh Criteria and Assessment Objectives that SCAA published for English and for English Literature Examinations in the very same booklet that specifies clustered forms of thinking:

The SCAA Criteria for GCSE English [1995]

The first of the stated assessment objectives for **reading** supports the aesthetic approach to texts which I have been advocating throughout this thesis:

> read, *with insight and engagement*, making appropriate references to texts and *developing and sustaining interpretations* of them. [my italics] [p.36]

The SCAA Criteria for GCSE English Literature

The first assessment objective again would appear to allow considerable scope for pupils to take an aesthetic approach to the texts they read: respond critically, *sensitively* and *in detail*,.. [my italics] [p.40]

Ironically, General Criteria for Reading have also now, apparently, been agreed for all the GCSE Boards although the wording for General Criteria varies from Syllabus to Syllabus. Most Boards strongly foreground a personal response. Here are just a couple of examples:

General Criteria for Reading, 1998

English, Grade B

Candidates develop *a perceptive personal response*. There is understanding of *the techniques by which meaning is conveyed* and of ways in which readers may respond. They support their responses with detailed references to language, theme, structure and context.

[SEG,1998 Syllabus, p.31]

English Literature, Grade B

Candidates show *independent understanding and appreciation of layers of meaning* in texts through *the identification and discussion of appropriate detail*.

They make relevant comparisons between writers' concerns, attitudes and ideas, *responding personally to the ways in which they affect the readers' responses*. They successfully communicate *insight and exploratory thought* in various forms.

They show analytical skill when exploring the social and historical settings of texts, their cultural contexts or the literary traditions on which they draw. [my italics] [NEAB, 1998 Syllabus, p.25]]

I would find these references to what I would regard as aesthetic forms of response very heartening, were it not for the fact that from an assessment point of view the opportunities for making personal responses to literature of any kind are steadily diminishing - and are not likely, therefore, to receive

the attention they deserve, either in the examinations or, far more importantly from an educational point of view, in the classroom. I address the issue of whether this reduction of opportunities in the examination system for both story reading and story writing actually matters, in terms of classroom practice, in my final chapter

Chapter Seventeen

Assessing pupils as story writers

In the previous chapter, I considered how pupils are currently being assessed as story *readers* and the extent to which they are given opportunities and credit for responding aesthetically to stories written by others. I shall now conduct a similar survey of the same external Tests and Examinations in order to discover:

a) to what extent they offer pupils opportunities for story writing;

b) to what extent stated Aims, Assessment Objectives and Performance Criteria or Level Descriptors offer opportunities for examiners to take an aesthetic or efferent stance to the stories pupils write.

Again, before I turn to the Papers, let me summarise what examiners are likely to be looking for when they turn their attention to *stories written by pupils*, depending on the stance they take.

Taking an aesthetic stance:

To what aspects of a pupil's story can this stance draw the examiner's attention?

a) It can draw attention to the effect the story has on the *examiner's* thoughts and feelings.

b) It can draw attention to the *examiner's interpretation* of the story's themes or values.

c) It can draw attention to the visual impressions that the story evokes *for the examiner.*

d) It can draw attention to the construction of the narrative *in relation to the examiner's experience* of the story.

Taking an efferent stance:

To what aspects of a pupil's story can this stance draw the examiner's attention?

a) It can draw attention to a *content* analysis of the story but not to an *interpretation*. What a text *signifies* must incorporate what the reader has 'made' of the story. [Rosenblatt,1978; Bleich,1980; Culler,1983; Bruner,1986;].

b) It can draw attention to a *linguistic* analysis of the story - grammar, spelling and vocabulary (what the KS2 SATs refer to as 'style').

c) It can draw attention to a *structural* analysis of the story - syntax, paragraphing, narrative techniques and codes.

d) It can draw attention to the *genre* of the story - eg.myth, folk tale, fairy story...

Taking an aesthetic stance involves the reader; taking an efferent stance dissociates the reader from the text.

English Tests for Key Stage 2, Summer 1997

The Writing Test

Opportunities for story writing

In the Writing Test, pupils were given a choice between 'Information writing' and 'Story writing'. In either case, they had a planning sheet with an allowance of 15 minutes to map out what they were going to write. The story planning sheet included the following instructions:

Tick the title you have chosen. Now make a note of some of your

ideas.
Remember:
Setting (Where and when does it happen?)
Characters (eg. Who are they? What are they like?)
How the story begins
What happens

There were three story writing titles to choose from. The first *A Strange Tale*, related to the earlier story-reading task as it used the same opening sentence as the story, with the invitation to 'Make up your own story, using this beginning.'

The second title *Rescue!* suggested a point of view:

One of the people in the story could be you, or you could write the story from the point of view of an eye witness.
It also included the following instructions:

You should think about:
* who or what was in trouble
* why they needed rescuing
* who carried out the rescue
* what happened

The third title *At the Water's Edge*, included an 'idea' in the form of a given sentence:

The beach was quiet, and hardly anyone noticed the figure standing by the rocks, gazing out to sea.
It also included a sketch of a beach with an upturned boat and the silhouette of a human figure standing by the rocks.

Each of these titles with their accompanying suggestions offers scope for a writer's creative imagination to come into play.

On the other hand, the 'compulsory opportunity' of 15 minutes for planning the story outline before launching into its creation, could encourage pupils to take an efferent approach to their story-writing as a kind of lego-block construction that pays more attention to fitting the components together than to creating a 'secondary world'.

Then, as with all tasks set under examination conditions, there is the time limit, in this case no more than 45 minutes in which to complete what is bound to be a first draft, with no opportunity for extension, elaboration or clarification. It may be difficult in such circumstances for the writer to retain an aesthetic stance to the act of creation. Writing to a strict time limit is not conducive to launching into writing as a process of discovery....

Opportunities for examiners to take an aesthetic or an efferent stance to the stories pupils write in the KS2 English Test

It is evident from the Mark Scheme[1] for assessing pupils' stories that the examiner is expected to take an approach which is wholly efferent, extracting information from the product with regard to the pupil's writing 'skills' but paying no regard to its import as a story, apart from noting the narrative techniques which have been employed. Even, therefore, if the child has succeeded, imaginatively, in creating a 'secondary world', the *engagement* of the reader with this world and with the characters which people it is to be disregarded.

An officer for the NFER made this distinction quite clear in a Paper[2] referring to the 1996 KS2 Writing Test:

1 DfEE, 1997, *English Tests* ***Mark Schemes***, KS2

2 Rees, F. *National Curriculum Assessment of Writing at Key Stage 2*, NFER
Paper presented at European Conference on Educational Research, 1996

> 'As readers, we usually have *a personal response* to a piece of writing. We may be influenced by the subject matter, or by whether we find the authorial voice appealing. Yet for eleven year olds who are in the process of developing their writing skills, it is *important that we set aside such considerations* in order to give full consideration to the skills that the child is developing as a writer.' [my italics]

Three fifths of the marks for the Writing Test are allotted for 'Purpose and Organisation' and one fifth each for 'Punctuation' and 'Style'. (Spelling is not taken into account in the assessment of pupils' stories as there is a separate test at Key Stage 2 for that aspect of writing.) Punctuation refers variously to full stops, question marks, speech marks and commas, depending on the designated level. Intriguingly, exclamation marks receive no reference at all!

It is clear from the Level Descriptors, that 'Style' directs the assessor's attention mainly to *sentence structure* ('a variety of simple and complex sentences') to *correct grammar* ('Pronouns and tenses are generally consistent throughout') and to *vocabulary choices* which somewhat confusingly for story writing, are expected to be both 'imaginative' and 'precise'.

The directions for Purpose and Organisation, Levels 3-5 refer pretty well equally to *content* and *form* ; there are no references to the *meaning* of the story. In the Level Descriptors, attention is directed instead to 'the use of narrative techniques' and to 'a secure grasp of the chosen form (eg. realistic narrative, fable, myth, adventure etc.).' Wherever a reader's response receives a reference, attention is always deflected from the meaning that might be made to *the reasons for its making*, eg.:
The reader's interest may be engaged through the use of different

narrative techniques, such as opening with action or dialogue, or moving between times and places. [Level 5, p.20]

The instructions in the Mark Scheme on what to take into account when reading a story bear out this efferent emphasis. To quote just one commentary for how one of exemplar stories might be assessed as a 'Level 4' which is the hypothetical 'level' that most pupil story writers are expected to reach towards the end of Year 6:

PURPOSE AND ORGANISATION

This is an example of a typical 'pony adventure' story. It is well structured, opening with dialogue to introduce the characters and the relationships between them. The plot, though unoriginal, is coherent and well-paced, and the events leading up to the fall are organised for effect. Action and dialogue are successfully interwoven, and there are some attempts to indicate the thoughts and feelings of the characters, (*She went off in a sulk; I sighed; I exclaimed with horror; Jenny smiled*) as well as characterisation through dialogue. Despite this lack of originality, the story has a theme, in that it is the unwelcome younger sister who saves the day, suggesting that the piece overall merits 15 [out of 15] rather than 12 marks'

GRAMMAR

Punctuation

Sentence demarcation is generally accurate. Inverted commas clarify where speech begins and ends, and there is some correct use of commas to separate clauses. In some instances, full stops have been omitted from speech punctuation.

Style

The style gives shape and interest to the writing, and a mixture of simple and complex sentences are used. A variety of connective are used to indicate relationship between ideas... There are some well chosen phrases... and some effective expansion... There is some use of adverbs to add interest....' [Script 5, p.42-43]

There is no invitation to *engage* here, with the way in which the narrator's feelings towards her younger sister change in the story from bossiness, to resignation, to co-operation and gratitude. Merely the recognition that 'there are some attempts to indicate thoughts and feelings of the characters.' Throughout, the assessor is expected to keep the story at arm's length and to regard it solely as an object for analysis.

English Tests for Key Stage 3, Summer 1996

At this Key Stage there are three Papers. Paper 1 tests both reading and writing, Paper 2 relates to the Shakespeare play and Paper 3 is an Extension Paper for reading and writing, which gives pupils who have gained sufficient marks on Papers 1 and 2 to be awarded a Level 7, an opportunity to reach a higher Level of 8 or 8+. As this chapter relates only to story writing, Paper 2 will not be considered.

Opportunities for story writing

As is the case in the KS2 English Tests, pupils are offered a choice between writing a narrative about 'a real or an imaginary event' and writing an informative article or an opinion based piece. It is possible, therefore, yet again, to avoid story writing altogether. If, however, a pupil chooses to write a story, there is no requirement as there was for KS2, to spend 15 minutes on planning an outline and no suggestion that pupils might do so.

In Papers 1 and 3 the narrative choice is thematically linked (but rather loosely) to the materials used for the reading test.

In Paper 1 the task reads:

Write about someone who is frightened or nervous but who tries to overcome these feelings.

In your writing you could:

* write about a real or imaginary event;
* try to build up a feeling of tension or suspense.

In the Extension Paper the task reads:

> Write your own description of an experience which was made more memorable because of extreme weather conditions. Your account could be based on a real or an imaginary event.

If they split the time evenly between the two questions on the Extension Paper, pupils will have 45 minutes to write their story. On Paper 1 they are specifically advised to spend 35-40 minutes on this task, although for slower pupils considerably fewer minutes will be available by the time they arrive at this final section of the Paper.

Nevertheless, it has to be said that the *opportunity* for pupils to write imaginatively and experientially is present in both Papers - and as the example which I shall take from the exemplars for Paper 1 demonstrates, in spite of temporal drawbacks it is possible to rise superbly to the occasion. *What is at issue, even more than the artificial time limit, is what the examiners are required to look for - and what remains 'out of the frame'.*

Opportunities for examiners to take an aesthetic or an efferent stance

In the Mark Scheme, the Performance Criteria for the task in Paper 1 which gave pupils the opportunity to '**write about a real or imaginary event**' were not divided into the 'Purpose and Organisation' 'Punctuation' and 'Style' sub-headings used in the Tests for Key Stage 2 nor were marks for these categories allotted separately.

Spelling, however, received a reference at every level as there is no separate Spelling Test. The demands for accuracy become increasingly stringent:

Level 5
Spelling, including that of words with complex regular patterns, is usually accurate.
Level 6
Spelling is accurate though there may be some errors in difficult words.
Level 7
Spelling, including that of complex irregular words is correct. [p.77]

The overall effect of the Performance Criteria is still to disregard the meaning of the story itself almost completely, as the Descriptor for **Level 6** indicates:

The pupils' [sic] writing is interesting and engaging in parts, using an appropriate narrative style and form to present events, characters or a setting. A varied vocabulary, a range of simple and complex sentences and appropriate paragraphing contribute to the quality of the writing, though the same quality may not be evident throughout. A range of punctuation is used correctly to clarify meaning. Spelling is accurate though there may be some errors in difficult words. Handwriting is in a fluent and legible style. [p.77]

As the reader's *experience* of the story is discounted, the ways in which the writer shows reader awareness and succeeds in drawing the reader into her story, are virtually ignored.

What You See Is What You Get - but who decides what to look for?

In order to demonstrate the differences of perception about the same story written by a pupil, which taking an efferent or an aesthetic stance can produce, I shall contrast the protocol instructions for the assessment of an

exemplar pupil's story[3] which appears in the KS3 Mark Scheme, with the response that I would make to the same story using my Guidelines for **Appreciation**:

Now turn your attention to the writer's handling of the story. Focus on those aspects of the writing which ***were successful for you as a reader*** with regard to character, plot and setting - or any other feature of the narrative. Relate your comments to specific details, avoid generalisations.

Briefly, the story is about a mountain hike which the narrator and her older brother took on a hot summer's day. Having lost their way, they suddenly come upon a coiled snake and are too frightened to move for some considerable time. When at last they run away the snake stays put. Apparently it was dead all the time!

<u>The commentary in the Mark Scheme</u>

The pupil begins with a contrast between the expected 'nice stroll' and the 'safari' which she and her brother eventually went on. The mountain is introduced with it's 'heather and bracken and ponds' as is the relationship with Gavin who 'kept reassuring me that he knew where we were'.

The tension between the two is well developed and the discovery of the snake is amusingly described. Tension is built up in a well controlled sentence as they wait for the snake to move: 'Everything seemed to be silent now, all I could hear was my heart beating fast, and Gamins deep breathing.'

Control of sentences, narrative pace and descriptive language are used to engage the reader in ways expected of Level 6 and 7. There is some width of vocabulary in this piece: 'reassuring', 'obvious', 'snapped', 'glared'. The spelling is erratic: "caught' and 'reassuring' are correctly spelt, but we also find '', belie' and 'always'. There are frequent

[3] Example 27, KS3 English Test Mark Scheme, p.63-65

incorrect uses of full stops, though speech marks and question marks are correct.

The pupil combines the incident and the relationship into an engaging narrative. Despite its weaknesses, which are most significant in the punctuation, the piece matches on a best-fit basis the Level 6 criteria.

Key Considerations

* engaging narrative
* good presentation of characters and setting
* control of sentence structure
* some weakness in punctuation and spelling

My appreciation

The feelings of the narrator are vividly evoked throughout this story. I can identify with her exhaustion and sense of despair when she realises that they are well and truly lost: 'My legs were like lumps of jelly and they had bad cuts all over them from all the heather.' I can also empathise with the way her feelings turn to panic when she spots the snake: 'Everything seemed to be silent now, all I could hear was my heart beating fast, and Gavins deep breathing.' I realise that 'sighlent' is an inadvertent misspelling but it does have a pleasing ambivalence about it! The '*seemed to be*' also conveys her awareness that she is perceiving the situation through the immediacy of her own feelings.

The relationship between the brother and sister changes as the story moves forward and is conveyed through their actions, through dialogue and through the girl's commentary on events. Initially the brother is confidently in total charge of the expedition: 'I thought we were just going for a nice stroll... but my brother had different ideas.' His increasing awareness that he has lost his way and his refusal to recognise the fact, is expressed subtly and indirectly, by implication rather than direct acknowledgement:
'We hadn't spoken for a long while all I could hear was his breathing getting deeper and faster. He just kept looking around in every direction. ... I asked him if he knew where we were "Of course I do." He snapped.' Every one of these details has a deliberate significance which convey's to me her brother's growing uncertainty. ICumulatively, it is a sophisticated and effective technique.

Gavin's self-confidence is initially dented when he loses his way and then totally destroyed, when he is paralysed with fear by the presence of the snake. One of the most moving moments of the story for me is when his sister, in acknowledging her own fear, comments that it was 'mainly for my brother's sake'. Even though he has shouted at her and called her a baby to cover his own anxiety, when the situation becomes self-evidently dangerous, above all,

she doesn't want any harm to come to him.

There are some interesting variations in the narrative time line. First of all there is the writer's management of time, through her silent commentary as the narrator, to indicate that the 'safari' is not proceeding quite as the brother intended: 'We had started from the house at half past two and when I glanced at my watch now it was twenty past four and we were still in the middle of nowhere.' The device of looking at her watch is used again to indicate (by contrast) the length of time in which they have been standing stock still next to the coiled snake.

Elsewhere, the narrator's observation that 'He didn't believe me, as we always say silly things to each other' took me briefly out of the present situation to offer a wider perspective on their relationship. Similarly the story concludes by taking a step into the future in order to look back at the whole experience: 'Now sometimes Gavin and I laugh about it, but it wasn't funny at the time, not at all.'

Finally, the details which the writer gives about their mountain 'trek through heather and bracken and ponds' enable me to picture the scene as I can relate it to my own experience of similar landscapes. I like the way that she refers later to how the heather had scratched her legs badly - I have the impression that they have strayed off any observable path as they plunge onwards. This is the kind of terrain in which, on 'an extremely hot day' one might expect snakes to make an appearance, basking in the sun. My only reservation about this highly competent and successful story, is that I wish she had chosen an adder instead of a grass snake!

Key Considerations

* The relationship between brother and sister
* The narrative viewpoint
* The creation of mood
* The evocation of setting

Differing perceptions

The protocol commentary suggests that on a 'best fit' this story rates a Level 6 - the level that most Year 9 pupils are expected to reach. Its quick skim of the narrative overlooks many points to which my 'key considerations' draw attention. I would claim that my interpretive assessment of the story, based on taking an aesthetic rather than an efferent stance, takes the pupil's achievements as a story writer more fully into account than the marking protocol. I would have no hesitation in rating this pupil's performance as a

story writer as exceptional, exceeding Level 8:

Pupils focus on specific features of the task and its genre, for example characters and settings are appropriately developed. They demonstrate sophistication of style and use of variation for a range of effects. *Their control of the writing secures and sustains the reader's involvement.* Narrative techniques are used with imagination and skill (eg. to create effects such as build up of tension, climax, surprise, bathos, unexpected endings, flashbacks, time lapse).[my italics][p.27]

To make a final observation on the protocol commentaries for story writing at KS3, I have to say that I am puzzled by their frequent use of the word 'control', as in 'control of sentences', 'control of style', 'control of the narrative form', 'good controlled writing with an imaginative structure', even 'control of character, event and setting'. What, I wonder, does such an all-embracing use of the word imply? That without a conscious and rigorous manipulation of words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs, written language will get out of hand somehow and leap about all over the place? Or that characters will run rampant in a surrealistic chaos of settings?

It suggests what I would regard as an efferent approach to story writing, rather like painting by numbers, where the framework or grid is planned in advance and nothing is allowed to escape from it. I do not believe that stories are created in that way. I believe with Frank Smith [1982] and Donald Murray [1984] that writing is a *process of discovery* that is generated by the writer's intention to make meaning. Ann Berthoff [1982] explains how language is not a pre-set 'muffin mould' into which our thinking is poured; rather 'thinking pulls a flow of language along with it'. This model for writing is dynamic; it recognises the generative capacity of the 'learning brain' when meaning-making is underway.

To quote Berthoff [1982] again:

> '...it's important and I think comforting to know that the means of making meaning which you depend on when you make sense of the world and when you write, are in part made for you by your brain and by language itself. You don't have to learn to focus your eyes or to control the responses of your eardrums. You don't have to invent English grammar when you compose a sentence... any more than you have to take grammar lessons to learn to talk.' [p.12]

GCSE English, MEG, (1510) 1996

Opportunities for story writing

Course work

The 1996 Syllabus stipulated six kinds of 'evidence' that Course work Folders must provide, of which only 'the redrafting and revision of writing' would appear to offer a possible opportunity for story writing. At most, given the range of writing required, it might have been possible to include a couple of stories, but these would have counted for no more than 10% of the total marks, however original, fluent, sensitive and expressive they were.

The Examination Papers

In both Tiers, the opportunities for story writing occurred in Section B of Papers 2 and 4. Pupils were instructed to spend 'about 45 minutes' on the task and to write 'about 350-450 words, leaving time to read through and correct what is written.' This cut down the time for *composing* to just over half an hour.

Pupils were then given the following instruction:

You are now going to use what you have read about the passages and in the poem(s) to look at them from another viewpoint. The Examiner wants to see how well you can write and *how well you can use your imagination* to extend and develop what you have read. [my italics]

At first, as I explained in the previous chapter, I interpreted this as an interesting way of making an aesthetic *reading* response to the texts in Section A, but when I came to read the Mark Scheme for each Paper, I discovered that how these particular stories and poems had become personally meaningful to their readers was almost irrelevant.

As for the Criteria for assessment of the story which the pupil produced, these were to be focused on evidence that could be extracted from the text with regard to the writer's 'skills' with hardly any attention paid to the *meaning* - ie. to what the story was about or to its effect on the reader. In this respect the assessment was once more largely efferent, similar to the assessment of pupils' stories in the KS2 and 3 English Tests.

For both the Standard and the Higher Tiers, the Descriptors [Levels 5-7] for Writing[4] , including story writing, read:

Level 5

The writing shows a basic level of competence... and an awareness of the possibilities of more complex structures and vocabulary. There is likely to be frequent single word error, but meaning is not impeded. The task has been addressed and the answer is clearly relevant to the assignment.

Level 6

Communication is clear and the sprinkling of language errors does

4 1996 Mark Scheme for English, Standard Tier,p.9

not confuse or mislead the reader. Interest is maintained throughout. The overall effect may be rather pedestrian and/or laborious. Simple structures are correct and more complex language, if attempted, is sometimes successful. The candidate is making a reasonable attempt to respond to the task.
Writing at this level is often either:
1 Virtuously simple, it. little is attempted. The structures are simple, the subject matter is straightforward and little risk is taken. There is very little error, meaning is entirely clear - the answer is relevant and well organised - but is unambitious.

OR

2 'Over-reaching', it. the candidate has a great deal to say, is interesting and potentially sophisticated, but in attempting to write racy, vivid English makes frequent grammatical errors and may attempt vocabulary which is imperfectly understood.

Level 7

The candidate is writing with a degree of confidence and security. The structures may be fairly simple and errors may occur when greater complexity is attempted but these errors will not impede communication or distract the reader unduly. Vocabulary may lack richness and 'exactness' but will be broad enough to describe and amplify. Subject matter may be naive and/or lacking in balance but will be relevant to the task given. Overall the writing will show competence and good development of skills.

There is no allowance here for the powerful effect that stories such as *Gone!* or *The Deceiver* or *The Picnic* or *Stranded!* might have on the reader, with respect to empathy or sympathy, moral values or visual impressions. To all intents and purposes, the stories need have no 'qualitative overtones' at all!

Conclusions

Opportunities for pupils to write stories and for examiners to respond aesthetically or efferently

Opportunities for pupils to write stories which involve their own thoughts,

feelings and visual imagination do exist in the KS 2 and 3 English Tests, although they are severely curtailed by limitations of time. Also, story writing is only offered as an alternative to non-literary forms of writing, it is not a statutory requirement. The responses required from examiners are almost entirely efferent, focusing on skills rather than meaning.

In the MEG 1996 English Syllabus there was an opportunity for pupils to submit a story of their own as a course work assignment and a requirement in Section B of Papers 2 and 4 (ie. both Tiers) for them to: 'see how well you can write and how well you can use your imagination to extend and develop what you have read' which could take the form of a story. However, it was clear from the Performance Criteria that this writing was to be assessed in a largely efferent way, similar to that in the SATs for Key Stages 2 and 3. This presumably, will continue to be the case with regard to pupils' responses to similar questions in the future, in accordance with the Attainment Targets for Writing laid down in the English Orders for the National Curriculum [p.30-31].

In the final chapter of this thesis, I shall consider in more detail the knock-on effect that the expectations of examiners and examination criteria can have on the way that teachers assess their pupils as story readers and story writers and the way that pupils, in consequence, see themselves as story readers and story writers.

Chapter Eighteen

Does It Matter?

'Teachers... need to develop better techniques for assessing the quality of an individual's response to literature.'

[Squire, 1964]

'Implications of the transactional theory for teaching generate hypotheses for research on the teaching of literature. ...Attention turns to the attitudes of the teacher, the classroom atmosphere... and the procedure that will encourage students to participate freely and honestly... in transactions with texts.' [Rosenblatt, 1985]

'We need a methodology for literature teaching based upon reading rather than criticism.' [Benton and Fox, 1985]

In Chapter 16 I quoted an observation of Claggett's [1996] that whatever stance predominates in our examination systems will tend to predominate in our classrooms also. I have indicated in the two previous chapters the extent to which our present Tests and Examinations offer opportunities for pupils to make personal responses to stories on the one hand and to write stories on the other - and the extent to which examination criteria reflect an aesthetic or an efferent stance to the assessment of both story reading and story writing.

I now want to consider in what respects the expectations set up by tests and examinations influence the way that teachers (and consequently pupils), approach both these activities as I ask the question: does the choice between the adoption of an aesthetic or an efferent stance matter, educationally speaking, when it comes to writing stories or reading them?

Does it matter what ***examiners*** have in mind when they assess pupils' performance as story writers and writers about stories?

In a recent article concerned with assessing the responses which A Level students make to poetry, Small [1994] comments:

> 'Opinions and open minds may be saluted in class, but something else takes over when the writing begins. The use of the first person singular has suddenly become inappropriate; the rooting of ideas in impression or opinion has become 'weak'; the expression of feelings has become irrelevant. The aesthetic purpose of reading has been usurped by the external imperative of 'close textual analysis'. It needs only the insecurity induced by the assessment game, with its enormously high stakes, to produce a powerful commitment to the 'safe' recourse of imitation...' [p.33]

Similarly, Dixon and Brown [1984] in their enquiry into what aspects of student response were being assessed for A Level examinations, question whether:

> 'students are able to be tentative - do they feel able to express uncertainty, doubt and lack of full understanding? ... Are they able to explore and express feeling as well as thought - indeed feeling in an intimate relationship with thought? Do they dare to be personal?' [p.13]

My question is not only 'What opportunities could examinations offer for pupils to take an aesthetic approach in the way that Small, Dixon and Brown describe, but also what opportunities could Performance Criteria and Level Descriptors offer *for examiners to take an aesthetic stance* to pupils' stories - and to pupils' responses to other people's stories?

Rosenblatt [1985] calls for the development through research of 'criteria of validity of interpretation' [p.49] and Claggett [1996] acknowledges that as far as personally meaningful responses are concerned, what she calls:

> 'the Humpty Dumpty version of interpretation: A poem means whatever I want it to mean... needs to be met with very clear criteria as to what constitutes a "warranted and responsible" interpretation.' [p.59]

I accept that for examiners to be given the opportunity to take an aesthetic stance to their assessment of either pupil writing or pupil reading, such criteria need to be formulated but I do not think that such formulations would be as problematic as, in a Humpty Dumpty kind of way it might at first appear.

Where current criteria for both story writing and story reading tend to focus on the skills of the writer, equivalent criteria could be introduced which focus the examiner's attention on *the effect of the story on the reader, in relation to the writer's achievements in handling the narrative.*

I suggest that the 'reference maps' for two forms of aesthetic response which I have outlined in the Appendices to Chapter 8 and illustrated in detail in the body of that chapter, could be used as the basis for specifying what aspects of a pupil's story (or of a pupil's response to a story) an examiner might look for, which take *meaning* as well as *construction* into account through an acknowledgement of *reader involvement.*

I have already demonstrated in the previous chapter [p.345-349] how reference to my Guidelines for '**Considering the Writer's Achievements**' could result in a more detailed way of looking at and

appreciating a pupil's story than that given in the 1996 KS3 Mark Scheme, when I compared the efferent protocol response to a pupil's story with my aesthetic response.

To illustrate my point further, let me turn again to the KS3 Performance Criteria for story *reading* [1996, p.21]and story *writing* [1996, p.77] Level 6 and offer an alternative version for each of the descriptors, which would allow an examiner to take an aesthetic stance to either a pupil's reading of a story or to her own reading of a pupil's story through explicit reference to the effect of the story in each case *on the reader.*

Criteria for the assessment of story reading, KS3 efferent version

Pupils give a response which focuses in part on how *the writer* builds up the danger. They illustrate with one or two examples of *the writer's* use of words or narrative technique. Their ideas are sometimes developed, supported by appropriate references. They may refer to *the writer's* techniques implicitly by identifying significant details which contribute to the build up of a sense of danger in the passage.

[my italics]

Criteria for the assessment of story reading, my aesthetic version:

Pupils give a response which expresses *what they thought and felt* about the appearance of the Polar Bear and the way in which Helen Thayer dealt with it. They explain by selecting significant details, how, *for them,* a sense of danger and suspense was evoked. They may also explain *how they pictured* the whole scene and *whether any questions came to mind* as they read Thayer's account of the whole episode.

Criteria for the assessment of story writing, KS3 efferent version

The pupils' writing is interesting and engaging in parts, using an appropriate narrative style and form to present events, characters or a setting. A varied vocabulary, a range of simple and complex sentences

and appropriate paragraphing contribute to the quality of the writing, though the same quality may not be evident throughout. A range of punctuation is usually used correctly to clarify meaning. Spelling is accurate though there may be some errors with difficult words. Handwriting is in a fluent and legible style.

Criteria for the assessment of story writing, my aesthetic version:
Which details in the story succeeded, for you, the reader, in creating a sense of fright? Could you relate to what the central character was feeling or thinking? Were there any significant details which increased your sense of empathy or sympathy? Were you gripped by what happened, could you picture it in your mind? Through which narrative techniques did the writer enable you to engage with the story?

I have acknowledged in my own research, indeed welcomed the fact that no two aesthetic readings will be personally meaningful in quite the same way. However, I would suggest that my maps show sufficient common characteristics, for 'criteria of validity of interpretation' to be formulated, as what is to be looked for, in aesthetic terms, is made explicit through direct and specific reference to ways in which a reader can choose to engage with a story 'under the guidance of the text'.

Differentiation

I would suggest further, that there are three respects in which an aesthetic or an interpretive assessment can differentiate between 'levels' of performance for examination purposes:

a) the extent to which the pupil expresses as a reader (or a story she has written allows for) **a *range* of thoughts, feelings and impressions** (visual or auditory), closely linked to details in the text;

b) the extent to which the pupil comments on (or a story she has written allows for) **a *range* of crafting components**, by means of which she (or the examiner) has been enabled to experience the story, closely linked to details in the text;

In considering the way in which A Level students are assessed, Dixon and Brown point out that:

> 'in deciding how well a candidate has performed... it is possible to obscure or ignore the central question: *is there evidence that the text is being evoked with imaginative understanding*?' [my italics] [p.15]

I would suggest that introducing aesthetic criteria for assessment, along the lines that I have illustrated, would have educational value in the recognition it could bring to the importance of responses on the part of both students and examiners, which retain a strong element of that 'imaginative understanding' or as Wilson [1966] puts it:

> '...maintain empathy during "sustained contact" with the work, joining personal involvement and analysis.' [p.41].

Does it matter what ***teachers*** have in mind for ***pupils as story readers***?

With reference to the teachers that she was working with on the teaching of reading in the California Assessment Project, Claggett [1996] writes:

> 'Whatever the structure you set up for the management of your reading programme, it is important not to lose sight of the over-riding goal of instilling a deep love of reading, of literature. We try to enable students to read fluently, to interact with the story as they read, to make good choices that stretch their imaginations and extend their understanding of the full range of human experience.' [p.19]

In our own primary classrooms, hopefully, teachers will continue to encourage children to listen to and to read stories in the way that Claggett describes. Hopefully, they will continue to invite ***oral*** responses to stories from their children, through discussion, through visual representation and through drama, which reflect that imaginative, empathetic and thoughtful engagement with the story world.

But if so little scope or credit continues to be given in the KS2 SATs for making ***written*** responses to stories which are aesthetic in the sense that they engage with the text and express the reader's own *experience* of it, then hope for regular opportunities to be made in the classroom for the kind of personally meaningful responses which primary pupils produced in my research to *Bella*, to *Ice*, and to *Beowulf* would appear to be less encouraging.

However, I recall the recognition of the primary teachers who took part in this enquiry, that the time we gave for pupils to formulate their own responses, quietly, in 10-15 minutes of writing time immediately after the reading of a story, could be seen as a valuable pre-talking activity, useful for the variations of response which can then be discussed as children reflect on what they each made of the story and on the processes involved. In this respect, certainly, a strong educational case can be made for inviting such responses and making writing time available for their formulation.

Jill, one of the teachers participating in my research suggested that one of the values of our responses as engaged story readers, for her own pupils, lay in these variations of response:

'I think it's an important part of story reading responses, that for children, they

have to realise that there are different things that we pick up on - both in what we notice about their stories and how we interpret what we notice.

As I explain in Chapter 3 [p.46] Jill perceives these variations as a valuable way of helping her children to develop as story readers:

'In that way, I think it's of great value. Because I do tend to worry about the fact that you get... a lot of technically good readers, but they don't read the way I understand reading, which is being totally in the story, making your own interpretation about what's happening. And it does worry me that they're not really "reading"

Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to find out from Jill whether she regarded the information retrieval questions which formed the basis of the 1997 KS2 Reading Test as a means of encouraging *'really "reading"'*, although from what she says here, I can imagine that her answer would have been negative.

At secondary level, I find that teachers still tend to regard 'development' in story reading as a move from personal response to textual analysis, turning:

> **'the young reader's attention away from the lived-through poem or story, towards an efferent reading...' [Rosenblatt, 1985, p.42].**

I have recorded how the secondary teachers who collaborated in my research were nearly all inclined to take this view.

Andy says:

'I get them to write their own response to begin with, but then move from that to the question "Well, how does the writer get you to feel like that about the story?"

Kevin says:

I've moved much more (and again it's very specifically because of the tests they're having to do) to focusing on strategies for extracting meaning from a text and giving them strategies like looking at the structure, identifying voice... looking at linkages... it's alerting them to the range of things to look for.
P. Looking for in relation to what?
K. To being able to answer the question 'How is the writer trying to present this character... build up the suspense... what kind of atmosphere is the writer trying to establish?
P. Techniques?
K. Literary analysis.

However, after reading the responses which his Y8 class made to *Ice* using my Guidelines, Chris wrote to me:

`yes, I do think this kind of writing or responding 'from the inside' of a text is very important.`

The point I would make here, is that for such responding to occur, teachers need a) to be convinced that an aesthetic response is educationally valuable, b) to have a clear sense of what an aesthetic response involves, and c) to have some idea of how it can be elicited. I believe that my research could have some influence on approaches to the development of pupils as story readers in all three respects

Does it matter what ***teachers*** have in mind for ***pupils as story writers***?
One indication of what teachers have in mind when they read a pupil's story is the comment which they write at the end, or as Andy described for me, the comment which they make on the pupil's assessment sheet. As part of my research, I made a collection of the kind of comments that teachers in the participating schools normally offered in writing, of which the following are a typical selection. As I had expected, they were clearly influenced by the

Performance Criteria set out in the SATs and by the Attainment Targets for Writing in the English Orders.

Teachers' written responses to stories by primary pupils

Well done. You have used complex sentences and may need to think about commas. All your sentences start with 'I'.

Potentially very good, but there is too much dialogue in proportion to the descriptive passages - I've told you so, so many times.

Satisfactory, but to get top marks, you will need to add detail.

Good, clear story - well done! Keep thinking about:
1) Spelling; 2) Mastering paragraphs.

Good work Colin. Very imaginative! Your use of punctuation is very good indeed. Also good use of paragraphs.

This is quite a good idea and the story improved as it went on. However, if you are to do well with your English SAT, you will have to include more detail and description.

Teachers' written responses to stories by secondary pupils

In their brevity, and in the mixture of praise and basic editorial comment that they offer, the kind of written responses that secondary teachers usually make to their pupils' completed stories appear hardly to differ at all from those of their primary colleagues:

This is a very powerfully written story with very clever use of sentence construction and build of tension. A pity that spelling spoils a fine piece of writing.

This story has a very ambiguous ending - is this intentional? You use a number of suspense techniques very effectively. You include a lot of detail and have

experimented with new vocabulary - good. You need to look again at the use of semi-colons.

An action-packed thriller here - what about the poor dead woman on the train? Lots of variety of pace - but you must look very closely at paragraphing, spelling, full stops and commas.

A compact story in which you successfully describe the dramatic impacts of the accidents. You also lead to the conclusion quite meaningfully. The descriptions used do set the scenes and definitely contribute to the story... although you might try and watch the stereotyping which sometimes is part of your work.

Very enjoyable piece Mark! Humorous and well written. Maybe you needed to vary your sentences, making some longer than others. At present you write them all a similar length (and a little flatly at times).

I think that you could have extended your story by adding some more description...Remember that you need to create a picture for the person who's reading your story. You must join up your handwriting .

Portfolio annotations

In one of the contributing primary schools the teachers of the two Y6 classes were also in the habit of making longer, carefully thought out commentaries on their pupils' stories for inclusion in the portfolios which they would be taking with them at the start of the next school year to their new secondary schools. I include one example here in order to compare the different aspects of the story that are revealed in the teacher's skill-based analysis with those which an aesthetic response can draw out.

A Special Gift - by Emma

Dad seemed uneasy, not himself. He pushed the soil down to make the flower comfortable. The last few weeks had been

harder than usual, what with Dad not being well.
Suddenly, he gave a great cough. He was choking and couldn't breathe!
"Dad, Dad are you O.K.?" but I could see he wasn't. I rushed to the phone and dialled 999 asking for an ambulance. After that, I came back to Dad, he was getting worse. I gave him some water and tried to help him to breathe more easily.
At the hospital I had to stay in the waiting room, Mum had come and was by my side. I couldn't forgive myself if anything happened to him. What if he didn't regain consciousness? I heard a slight bang - it was the doctor.
"What is it? Is he O.K.?" I cried.
The doctor told us that he was breathing but was still quite unstable. We were allowed to see him. I burst open the doors. Dad didn't look right. Not the man I knew - so tired! I stayed with Dad for about a week in hospital; the doctors said he still wasn't up to going home. We talked a lot, more than we'd ever talked before. I felt as if I was only just getting to know him. He told me that he had cancer and had had it for quite some time. I knew he didn't have much time left but how long was that? Mum tried to be sympathetic with me but I wanted to spend all my time with Dad - what little time he had left.
It was the day before it happened; he got out a little case and opened it, a beautiful pearl lay on the surface. I was amazed at such beauty, so pure. "For you," he said softly. I couldn't believe that it was mine. I held it gently in my hand. It had once belonged to my Grandma (his mother's) and she gave it to him.
The next day, I felt fear in the air. I was uncomfortable. I was telling Dad about school when suddenly he stopped breathing! I called for help and I was taken out of the room. About 15 minutes later the doctor came in with a solemn look on his face. "He's d-d-dead isn't he?" Why my Dad, he didn't do anything wrong!
A few days later, my things were moved into my Mum's. I eventually got used to it. Every morning I would take the pearl out of its case and place it in my hand. It was my special gift from my Dad.

Emma's comment

My reasons for choosing this story are as follows: It had a clear ending. It was very sad and emotional and it was one of my best stories. I think I'm quite good at sad stories.

The teacher's portfolio annotation of ***A Special Gift***

A Special Gift was written with the intention to stir the emotions of the reader. It is a sad story, very well written and believable.

Events in the story are logically related and the length of the story well judged with respect to pacing and detail.

The writer knew she had to structure her story well with a beginning, middle and end suitably distinguished.

I think the interaction between the characters is excellent and there is a powerful relationship between the father and daughter which helps the climax of the story.

The writer uses varied and appropriate vocabulary, and creates a suitable atmosphere throughout`: "The next day, I felt fear in the air - I was uncomfortable."

The writer was pleased with her story and enjoyed her writing. We discussed how the story could be extended and how appropriate choices between Standard English and colloquialism can be shown in distinction between direct speech and narrative.

The story works very well and is enjoyable and easy to read which was also one of the child's intentions for writing.

Here, Penny is taking on that 'teacher-as-examiner' role which Britton and his team [[1975] found to be so common in their national sample of writing across the curriculum and which is currently so strongly reinforced by the National Curriculum requirements for assessment. She is not, however, addressing her remarks directly to Emma, so much as to the teacher Emma will have next, maybe, or to a potential moderator of teacher assessments.

In accordance with the Orders for English for Writing, she is focusing more specifically on the writer's skills than on her own experience of the story. This is only hinted at in generalisations such as 'written with the intention to stir the emotions' and 'there is a powerful relationship between the father and daughter'. There is no direct reference to the father's death or to its effect on the daughter who is the narrator, or indeed to its effect on her as the reader.

Instead, there are references to 'events... logically related', 'a beginning, middle and end suitably distinguished', 'varied and appropriate vocabulary' and 'a suitable atmosphere throughout'. It is not that I disagree with any of these comments, but somehow, they seem to miss the point because they are not *meaningful*. They cannot be, because the reader has stayed outside the story in order, conscientiously, to scrutinise it as an object for analysis that will meet the assessment requirements which provide her with a check list of what to look out for.

My appreciative response to ***A Special Gift***

As I re-read Emma's story, I am struck, yet again by the sensitive way in which she explores bonding and separation. There is that powerful opening image of the father firming down the soil round a plant 'to make the flower comfortable' an echo of the security that he has provided for his daughter. And then, without warning, he collapses and suddenly their roles are reversed and it is she who cares for him through the final days of his terminal illness.

I feel for her and also with her, as she experiences **guilt** 'I couldn't

forgive myself if anything happened to him', **concern** 'Dad didn't look right. Not the man I knew - so tired!' and **closeness** 'We talked a lot, more than we'd ever talked before'. But death is inevitable and has to be faced up to, with the possession of her grandmother's pearl as a reminder of continuity to ease the pain of parting a little:

Every morning, I would take the pearl out of its case and place it in my hand. It was a special gift from my Dad.

It is only at the end of the story that I realise the child has already had to endure the experience of an earlier family separation, when I read how 'my things were moved into my Mum's.' I am reminded of Fox's description [1993] as she describes Barthes' proairetic narrative code, of how:

> 'The meanings of the actions in a story take their significance from the story's closure.' [p.171]

With this realisation, that the child had been living with her Dad, all the earlier events in the story take on an extra poignancy, as does her stoical 'I eventually got used to it.'

There are also the different viewpoints from which I can choose to enter the story and perceive what is happening. As well as the narrator, from whose viewpoint I have perceived the story so far, and whom I can only think of as a girl similar to Emma in age, there is the father who has provided a secure home for his young daughter and who talks with honesty to her about his immanent death, and there is the mother who 'tried to be sympathetic' but who is rejected until the death occurs, when living with her becomes the only option. What are their feelings about their daughter,

reading between the lines? Looked at this way, this story is far more complex than simply a matter of beginning, middle and end or logical sequencing of events.

I am glad, as her teacher confirms, that 'The writer was pleased with her story and enjoyed her writing.' Emma is indeed 'good at sad stories' as she herself remarks with some satisfaction. But I would suggest that she deserves the kind of engagement with her story from a reader, for assessment purposes as well as for herself, that clearly she put into it as a writer.

A question of audience

I need, at this point, to diverge for a few moments from the specific question 'Does it matter what teachers have in mind for story writers when they make their written responses' to a broader question about sense of audience, relating to the comments which I have just made about Emma's story.

I have suggested that the audience that Penny seemed to have in mind in her portfolio annotation, could be either Emma's next teacher or possibly an external moderator checking that the stated Performance Criteria were being followed in teacher assessments of pupils' work.

The audience that I have just had in mind as I made my comments about Emma's story, has been readers of this thesis. I realise as I write this, that my comments on the 'snake' story in the previous chapter, were also addressed to a more public audience than the writer herself. They do not have the personal voice that would enter the response if I were addressing the pupil directly. In Chapter 10, however, I maintain that it is this personal

engagement with the writers which contributes strongly to the aesthetic quality of the teachers' appreciative responses.

Now I have to ask myself, can my comments here and in the previous chapter also be regarded as predominantly aesthetic rather than efferent? The answer I suggest, lies in that other important aspect of an appreciation, which connects the *writer's achievements* in handling the narrative with the *reader's experience* of the story that is offered. The personal voice is absent, but the personal *meaningfulness* of the story is retained. It is in this respect that I believe that examiners can also make 'a warranted and responsible interpretation' which acknowledges that there is more to a story than its articulated skeleton.

Does it matter what ***pupils*** have in mind when they read stories and when they write stories?

And thus we come to the crux of the matter; it is, after all, what pupils have in mind and what they do with their minds that is central to any educational endeavour. I explained in the Foreword and in the Prologue to this thesis, why, out of the three aspects of language development in the English curriculum: grasping the code, handling the medium, making meaning, for me as an educator making meaning through spoken or written language is its prime function. Above all, I have always wanted to give children, as language users, the confidence to make meaning for themselves.

I chose to be an English teacher because I wanted what mattered to children and students in their everyday lives to be part and parcel of what we did together. Reading stories and writing stories enables such connections to be made but they can also extend those 'snail horn perceptions' about what it

means to be human, by imagining the lives of others as well as their own. The knowledge that both these activities can bring into being if readers and writers are personally involved, is an *aesthetically* formulating process which develops the sensitivities of readers and writers towards their own experiences and towards those of fellow human beings.

I think of how Holquist [1982] describes Bakhtin's concept of authoring our own lives in relation to the narratalogical power of stories:

> 'In order to remain a constantly potential site of being, my self must be able to conduct its work as sheer capability, a flux of sheer becoming. If this energy is to be given specific contours, it must be shaped not only in values but in story. Stories are the means by which values are made coherent in particular situations.' [p.37]

I think of Britton [1968], pondering over the reasons for story reading and story writing:

> 'What a child writes is of the same order as what the poet or novelist writes and valid for the same reasons. What are the reasons? Why do men improvise upon their representations of the world? Basically because we never cease to long for more lives than the one we have...' [p.10]

And then I think of the lack of overt acknowledgement accorded to such personally meaningful approaches to story reading and writing, especially at the formative primary stage, and yes, there is a cost! It does matter what pupils have in mind, and they are being sold short if their minds are filled with nothing but techniques and technicalities and not at all with the nature of those secondary worlds which stories enable them to explore.

To give some indication of what pupils themselves have in mind as they

seek to fulfil the expectations of examiners and teachers, I have taken as my final illustrations, examples of the ways in which some thirteen year olds viewed the stories which they themselves have composed.

Secondary pupils responding to their own stories

It is clear that the way in which their teachers focused and commented on what was to be valued and assessed in story writing, strongly influenced what pupils themselves looked for and valued in their own work. In one of the participating schools, for instance, where the classroom context for writing and responding to stories strongly emphasised aspects of narrative construction and technical correctness in accordance with National Curriculum requirements, this was how pupils thought about their own stories once they were completed. Their comments were mainly skill-based, focused on how they had performed as writers; there was very little indication of what the stories themselves had meant to the writers in any personal sense.

Karen's story writing appraisal on her Learning Review Sheet

The story I chose appealed to me because of the plot. It was interesting especially when the prisoner escaped, it was exciting and dramatic. It needed a bit of work on the beginning and ending.

I think I dragged it on a bit but it wasn't that easy to start or end it. I could of dragged it on for years. I think the plot could of built it up a bit more though. I didn't reply explain my characters that well and could of done better. I didn't really have a main character it was based around a couple of people. Some characters were roughly explained so you got a rough picture.

I think I concentrated on the plot a little more than

anything else. I think I've used the setting well where they stop off to eat. ...

On my ending, I think I did well not to [have a] quick ending but the right timing. My beginning I used speech because it was hard to start off in any other way. I think the speech has worked but it is nothing spectacular. If I was to carry on my ending as I said before it would of dragged on.

It has never been my strong point, spelling, and it runs through the family, but it was just simple words I got wrong and long words I got right.

Jane's story writing appraisal on her Learning Review Sheet

The reason that I chose this story out of my others is because it was set in an unusual setting and was quite adventurous. I was also able to extend it a bit more than the others and make it sound interesting. The plot of my story was quite good and I think that because it was an adventure story that I did have a jumpy plot but I tried to put the biggest event at the end so that I could gradually get down to normal again. ...My characters were quite creative and I did spend quite a bit of time trying to make my Grandam sound good... There were three minor characters. I think I explained them quite well but could of described them a bit more.

The area I think I did best was the physical as I put a lot more about it and explained it more.... The setting was described better in different places, for example, the scene was described better at the lake and on the farm but it wasn't described that well when he was on the horse and saw the snake.

The beginning of my story worked really well and I thought it got off to a good start and set things going nicely. I could maybe have improved a bit more on it though.
The ending wasn't as good as the beginning as it wasn't

explained enough. I definitely think I could improve on the end.

I am impressed by the seriousness with which both girls take their writing. But they do at times seem to be doing a certain amount of shadow boxing with the crafting of their stories and both take care to cover their backs by freely confessing to an awareness of their inadequacies as learner writers. We are given glimpses of what the stories meant, personally, to them: 'It was interesting especially when the prisoner escaped' from Karen and 'I did spend quite a bit of time trying to make my Grandad sound good' from Jane. But mostly, their attention is focused on how they handled the narrative.

In my investigation, some of the teachers who responded to my Guidelines and produced engaged responses to some of their pupils' stories, also asked the pupils to write down how they had been 'involved' during the writing. Their responses offer a different kind of insight into what they made of their own stories which suggest that they were able to take an aesthetic rather than an efferent stance to their own work . This may well have been equally true of course for Karen and Jane during the creation of their stories but it is not evident in their responses because they perceived their teacher's expectations differently.

Ben's response to *The Deceiver*

When I wrote my story, the involvement I had with it was about the same as the involvement that I have when I'm reading a story. I almost care for the characters and hope they make it through the story all right. This affects me slightly when I'm writing, because I always want the good characters to live and the bad ones to die - if it's that sort of story. For example, in my story all the good people

survive and the bad people die.
When I read a story I make a vision of it in my head. I build up a detailed picture of what's going on. This is what I did when I wrote my story. I made a picture and then added the speech and stuff.

Ian's response to *Personalities*

When I was writing, I did feel involved in the 'life' of my characters, as I based my characters on people I know. For example, Russell is a boy I know quite well, who has learning difficulties in real life and he is the 'hero' of my story. I think that by basing the characters on real people, you can write more vivid, detailed descriptions and your feelings and thoughts are more real - and in being more real it makes the story more interesting.
Also, when I thought of settings and 'happenings' I based these on things I had seen and remembered.

Pupils from another participating school also demonstrated how they could respond aesthetically as story writers in ways that show how their stories meant something more to them than mere exercises in construction:

Jason's response to *Crying Wolf*

I got the feeling that the main character, Steve, was always in trouble and that he didn't know what he was doing because nobody believed what he said.
One moment I could picture clearly in my mind is the opening scene. I can imagine a tall, dark, ruined church with nobody about and with a long, empty garden with maybe a few gravestones. Also I can imagine a long pathway through the garden and up to the door. I can also picture the inside of the church with a tall long roof, abandoned benches with drips dripping from the ceiling to pools on the floor.'
The thing that interests me most about what happens in my story is the ending. I think that the way my story ended fits in exactly to what happened in the story. Also it keeps people hanging on.

Anouska's response to *Nowhere to Run*

My story has quite strong characters in it. The Dad is mean in Rachel's point of view but he's not really that bad. I can relate to Rachel more, because even though I don't have a Dad like her, I also feel that sometimes things get on top of me. I felt that the strongest part of my story was when Rachel was lying on the ground with a wounded face and a complete stranger walking towards her.
My story has quite an unfinished ending because you want to know what happened next, even though I don't myself know what happens. It would be good if someone else wrote an ending to carry on from it, so that I could see what happens in someone else's mind...
As I was writing my story, I had to think about what the reader would think, because things that make sense in my mind might not make sense in someone else's. I also had to think about how to put my ideas down in words, because sometimes I had good ideas but couldn't put them down on paper.

I now come to my last question:

In what respects can this research make a contribution to educational knowledge?

About the 'Implications for Research', Rosenblatt [1985] has this to say:

> 'Teachers brought up in the traditional modes especially are at a loss to understand how they can evaluate students' work in literature classes once the security of "correct answers" is lost. Here, research could do much to elucidate *the kinds of evidence that might signal growth in quality of transactions with texts, for example relating "response" to "evocation" and to elements of the text....*' [my italics][p.49-50]

Throughout my enquiry, I have considered the implications of Rosenblatt's aesthetic transactional theory, for teachers responding to pupils' stories as

well as for pupils responding to literary texts. Through the development of Guidelines for teachers and pupils specifically designed to elicit personal evocation and response, through mapping the features which characterised the responses I received, and through reflecting on the processes that 'engagement' and 'appreciation' involve, I believe that I have demonstrated the educational value in a classroom context, of making responses to stories which reveal the ways in which the story has become personally meaningful to the reader .

I have also suggested ways in which interpretive criteria could be developed based on taking an aesthetic stance that is meaning-related, which could provide 'a warranted and responsible interpretation' of a pupil's performance as a story reader and as a story writer and which could allow for differentiation in an aesthetically conceptual way. I would therefore want to argue for the inclusion of explicitly aesthetic criteria in our systems of assessment, which recognise the value of responses which are engaged as well as appreciative - on the part of teachers and examiners as well as pupils.

Just as important, in an educational context, is *the recognition that stories do matter* - telling them, reading them, writing them. They are intimately related to the ways in which we find meaning in our own lives and in the lives of others. It does not seem impossible that opportunities in the present curriculum for writing stories and responding personally and imaginatively to stories will be severely curtailed. If that does indeed happen then we are in danger of losing an enormously valuable educational resource.

I am a firm believer in conviction pedagogy and in the 'advocacy role' that

educational researchers can take up in the enquiries they make. The issue of advocacy or impartiality is currently under debate in the U.S. in the pages of the *Educational Researcher* [Donmoyer, 1996; Berliner, 1997; Resnick, 1997]. I chose to be an educational action researcher because action research sets out from the start to improve practice and to create more effective contexts for learning.

Writing this thesis has involved my endeavours to become clearer in my own mind about why, for me, stories matter; why, for me, meaningful responses to stories matter; and through pursuing those questions, why, for me, meaningful responses to pupils matter. But I hope that it will also help others to recognise the value that stories have in the curriculum, reading them, writing them and responding to them in an aesthetic as well as an analytic way.

In my mind, I picture my research like a tree which has now reached the blossoming stage. But in order to bear fruit, it will need others to cultivate it who will find their own ways of responding with engagement to the issues that it raises and to the story that it tells. I am well aware that in education, as in life, we can never change the understandings of others for them, but in sharing the growth of our own understanding we can hope to point ways forward and that is what I have endeavoured to do.

Afterword

Stories waiting to be told

I am keenly aware that many further stories could grow from this investigation and I list some of the possibilities here as I look forward to the journeys still waiting to be undertaken:

The tip of the iceberg - discovering more about the virtual texts which form inside the heads of pupil writers as words form on the page.

Helping pupil story writers and readers to develop their mind's eye and their mental ear.

Exploring further how young readers can be encouraged to incorporate their own engagement with a story into a developing appreciation and understanding of its construction.

Exploring further how teacher readers can incorporate their own engagement with a pupil's story into an explicit appreciation of the pupil's achievements in handling the narrative.

Developing in greater detail interpretive criteria for the assessment of pupils' stories and of pupils' responses to the stories of other authors.

Investigating further, (beyond a literary context), the educational value of making aesthetic responses to pupils' written work which are both engaged and appreciative.

Continuing to create the story of my own 'coming to know'...

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Appendix

All the pupils' stories, arranged alphabetically

1. Crying Wolf
2. Extinguishing the Flames
3. Gemma's Best Friend
4. Gone!
5. Grumpy Man at 34
6. House War Three
7. Lost Underground Treasure
8. Murder on the Moor
9. My Guilty Secret
10. Nowhere to Run
11. Our Adventure
12. Personalities
13. Rowanne's Adventures
14. Stranded
15. The Big Match
16. The Deceiver
17. The Gang
18. The Haunted House
19. The Knight and the Mushroom
20. The Last Minute
21. The Night We Went to the Haunted Bridge
22. The Picnic
23. The Pool That's Open to the Big Sea
24. The Runaway Tiger
25. The Secret Island Castle
26. The Secret of Adventure Island
27. Time Travel
28. Tom at Terror Towers
29. Tonsilitis Attack
30. What It's Like to Win the Lottery

ALL THE PUPILS' STORIES

[1]***Crying Wolf*** [Y8]

It was a mysterious place. People were not brave enough to look at it. It was a tall black shadow looming over the empty garden. No one went in there, no one was even living near it. It was an ancient building that was crumbling and decaying.

It was early morning. The Stevenson household started off noisily.

"Stephen!"

He slowly made his way to the kitchen.

"Yes?" he said.

"I'm gonna kill you! I hear you've been writing on that old church wall. Is that right?"

"I didn't want to. Neil forced me to do it. I didn't even know it was a church."

"That's no excuse. What would the neighbours think of the police coming round here? You've pushed it too far this time."

"Well, if that's the way you feel I'm off! I'm going out to clean that church wall. I'll be back this evening. Don't expect me back for lunch. I'll take some money with me. If I don't return will that make you happy?"

He stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

He went into the garage, got a bucketful of water and a sponge. With a bit of a struggle he got moving again. About ten minutes later he arrived. He hesitated at the bottom of the path. He thought 'God, do I have to do this?' But he had promised to do it. He walked up the path. He eventually reached the wall that he [had] graffitied. It read **"STEVE IS THE FUTURE OK"** He started to scrub.The paint seemed to be superglued to the wall. He scrubbed a bit harder. At last one letter came off. It took him an hour just to get one word off.

Then he started to become curious. 'Why did Neil want me to graffiti here?' he thought. 'Because Neil bet me to, that's why...' He decided to go in. When he got in, he sat on one of the old benches. His arms were aching and they felt as if they would drop off at any minute. It was then that he noticed the atmosphere inside the church. It was cold and damp and Steve heard the slow drip, drip of water, probably from the thunderstorm the night before. The bench he was sitting on was cold and hard. He then noticed that a five pound note had come out of his pocket and fell onto the floor, so he knelt down and picked it up. He just happened to look under the bench...

What he saw next was something that made his blood run cold. Underneath the bench was a dead body. He froze. The body looked quite fresh. This made Steve feel very scared. He thought 'If I stay here it will be me next.' Without any hesitation he jumped back and ran

out of the door. He ran out and ran back to the wall that he was cleaning, picked up his things and ran home. He was shaking all over.

His Mum came into the room.

"What's the matter?" she asked, "Had an electric shock?"

"Dddddead bbbody in chchchchurch," he said.

"Don't make me laugh - there's food in Somerfield, so what?"

"Tttthis is tttrue!" said Steve.

"Yeah? And I'm living in the year 2000."

"I'm calling the police."

"Why?" said his Mum, "What have you done now?"

Taking no notice of her, Steve went upstairs and dialled 999.

The police station answered.

"Hello, I want to report a dead body in a ruined church," said Steve.

"A dead body in a ruined church!" said the officer. "This has got to be a hoax. What's your name kid?"

"I'm Steve Sstevenson."

"Well, no wonder. You're that boy who wrote the graffiti on that church wall aren't you? You're winding me up!"

"Honestly, I'm not," said Steve, "you've got to believe me. Meet me outside the church. You'll see."

"OK, what time?"

"About 3.00."

The policeman couldn't wait to get off the phone because he was cracking up. "OK then, we'll see you there."

Putting the phone down, Steve went downstairs. He didn't bother telling his Mum what he had done, because he knew that she wouldn't believe him.

He went out of the house and decided to get some lunch. He then found out that he had left his money at the church. He had to go back there... when he got there, he thought again of what a spine chilling sight it was. Trying not to think about it, he ran up the path. When he got to the wall he was cleaning, he got the feeling that he was being watched. As he walked [back] down the path he also got the feeling that he was being followed.

Thinking he was imagining it, he walked into town. The town street

was noisy and fumes of car exhausts filled the air. People were hurriedly rushing up and down the pavement, probably late back to work on their lunch break or getting to the shops before the afternoon rush. Steve had to go down a dark alley to get to his favourite cafe.

The alley was cold and the walls on each side were covered with graffiti. As he walked down, he was sure someone was following him; all the way from the church he had that feeling. He turned around. Behind him was a man who couldn't be more than twenty five or twenty six. He was wearing dark clothing and had long hair waving in the wind. Thinking that this person was following him, Steve ran down the alley. About two minutes later he arrived at the cafe.
When Steve was half way through his lunch, he noticed the headline on the front of someone's newspaper. It said '**SERIAL KILLER STRIKES AGAIN**'. Steve read with some interest....

It was 2.00 when Steve finally finished his lunch.He thought he'd better go back to the church. He had better take his cleaning stuff with him and look like he was doing the job or else the police would be after him again. He suddenly remembered that he had taken his cleaning equipment home before lunch.

He was out of breath as he entered the garage to get his things. He leant against the wall for a few seconds so it was nearly 3.00 by the time he got back to the church. Steve decided to wait outside the church at the end of the path. He was too scared to go any nearer without the policeman.

Half an hour later, Steve looked at his watch. It read 3.30. He began to think that the police would never come but decided to wait. He looked towards the church. Steve sensed that someone was coming up behind him. Thinking it was the police, he turned around.There behind him stood a man with a knife....

As the man walked away, the faint outline of the graffiti said 'STEVE IS THE FUTURE' - but the 'OK' had come off.

[2]***Extinguishing The Flames*** [6]

It was an early morning at Miami, when the sun was rising onto a great day. Amy Longman stretched her skin into a nice shape and burst her mouth open to breathe out air. She jumped out of bed with a great spring to keep her going for the whole day. Amy was happy, she was usually happy but this time she had added life and felt that something nice and exciting would happen.

She remembered what had happened yesterday.The manager had called her into his office and explained that he was going to send her to West Africa for a transfer. She swung round and pulled the wardrobe open to remove her suitcase. She took her jeans and she didn't realise that they had a hole in. She started packing her clothes. She finally put the last pair of shorts into her suitcase. Now she couldn't do it up, so she sat on it. Finally, she did, and went into the kitchen to get a cup of coffee. This time tomorrow, she would be on the plane - how exciting!

On board the plane, Amy sat next to Nicola Curtis. They both felt excited and introduced themselves. They found that they had lots in common. They both loved wild animals and they were both going to West Africa. Nicola and Amy had a bumpy ride but they finally got there: West Africa!

They arrived at the airport all shaken up after the journey. They were glad to be safely on the ground The first thing they did was to go to the canteen because their mouths were dry. Nicola ordered a bacon roll and Amy had a coke and some chips. Then they went outside to wait for transport. The journey to the tent site [was] one hour and a half. Their tent awaited them for a cosy night, where Amy Longman and Nicola Curtis were having a rest.

Monday - this morning was a good start to their first week. They washed in the river, which was very dirty but the best thing they could find. They started getting dressed into shorts and T-shirt. They went to hire a jeep for the long journey. Then they went for a drive. They began to get thirsty so they stopped for a while to have a cold drink. Amy bent down on her knees at the same time as Nicola and together they took a great sip.

ZAP! Amy felt funny - it felt like she had a longer neck than an ostrich. Amy looked at Nicola. She didn't realise it was Nicola, so she swung round and trotted off in a different direction from the elephant (which really was Nicola). Amy wondered why she felt so strange. So she found a wet leaf and looked at it - and found that she was an ostrich. When she [had] turned into an ostrich she [had] lost her memory.

So she then remembered on the plane, who she sat by. It was a nice lady called... oh well, what colour hair did she have? I know, blonde! Now, how tall was she? Yes, she was around 5 ft, a bit taller than me. Amy turned around, rushing to find - NICOLA! Yes! She then came to some human beings. She stared at the people. The people stared back but there was no sign of a blonde about 5 ft called Nicola.

Amy came to a sandpit. She looked around - it looked really creepy because the mist was lowering, quicker and quicker, until it was on the ground. You couldn't see where you were going. She found an elephant calf. Amy went away to call for help - the ostrich said to Nicola "I can't help you, but I'll go get some help." So Amy went to find some help for Nicola.

Amy came to a herd of elephants. She asked a female elephant if she could come and help, because she was bigger than amy. So amy ran as fast as she could and the elephant walked behind. The ostrich, with the elephant behind, came running up to the swamp. Then the female elephant wrapped her trunk around Nicola's tummy and pulled as hard as she could. And then Nicola was out of the swamp but covered in mud.

Amy and Nicola decided to stay in West Africa but decided to think carefully before they ate or drank anything. They liked being the

animals they had changed into, so they decided to stay as an ostrich and an elephant. Amy eventually had a chick and settled down quietly.

The End

[3]***Gemma's Best Friend*** [Y3]

Hello there, I am the story teller and this is the story about a family and their names are Owen, Sharon, Scott and Gemma and Adrienne. And they was a family that had three children. As you know their names, now we can start the story.

It was a summer day and it was vey hot. And they all went out of the house to say welcome to Gemma's friend. And as you know, they all said welcome and Gemma went to cuddle her because she was Gemma's best friend.

Gemma's best friend came and Gemma was angry because she did not know that she was coming to her house. And she said "Why didn't you give me a letter or why didn't you ring me?"

"Because I didn't have time to."

"Oh."

[4]***Gone!*** [Y8]

The chief wiped his fingers on a rag, leaving it stained red with the paint that was already smeared all over my tanned skin.

"There, Sarik, you're a man now."

All the ceremonies of manhood were over, Rolak and I were ready to go on our deciding journey deep into the jungle. We stood at the edge of the mass of dark trees which had been part of our life for fourteen years now, but today from early this morning they seemed unusually dark and scary. I looked back at the tribal village so serene and still, yet so full of life. My mother [was] lazing in the woven hammock in the shade of the hut, my father was preparing to go out hunting, gathering his bow and poison arrows which were scattered around on the dusty floor. I took a deep breath and headed into the sacred forest.

The sound of overpowering screeches and squawks, hums and hisses, and the howl of a monkey in the tree above my head. First the sound seems to come out of nowhere, then you look closely and you start to see animals - everwhere! Rolak was walking behind me as we cut through the lush green jungle, it's like a maze, mysterious, exciting, scary. After about an hour of walking, the rain came. First just drip, drip , drip, then we had to stop and stand under a large plant to shelter us.

The rain seemed to last forever, so we picked off two of the massive leaves from the plant and carried on walking. The leaves were heavy and my back ached as we ran. Everything was flashng past, just a long streak of green. I saw a log in front of me, but it was too late. I was going too fast to stop - I tripped and fell in the mud. Rolak laughed.

"It's not funny!" I screamed, "Help me up!"

He pulled me up. I was covered in brown mud, I felt sick, I wanted to go back but we'd come too far and it was getting late if we wanted to be back by dark. We took a few more steps into the forest, and there it was - what we'd come for, the Yanim tree, its bright purple fruits shining in the sunlight! We sat at the foot of the grand tree and fell asleep.

We were woken by a deafening sound which soon faded depressingly into the distance. I jumped up and grabbed Rolak. We each took a handful of fruits and ran into the dark forest. I was frightened. A black mist seemed to haunt the trees - I was so scared, there was darkness swamping my mind. We just ran.

Suddenly I saw a light, a bright light. "The village," I said, "it must be the village!" I grabbed Rolak's arm, so tight it hurt my hand as well as his arm. As we got closer, we realised it wasn't the village, it was a clearing - but we hadn't passed any clearings on the way. We stopped at the edge of the trees and just stared. Torn leaves formed a carpet on the bare ground. Tree stumps were all that were left, apart from the dead and dying animals. I approached a baby sloth which was lying down still gripping a broken branch. I lifted it up, then quickly placed it back as something else caught my eye. It was a Uakari monkey with its bright red head. I knew it wouldn't survive long as it only ate the fruits of trees which had gone - but there was nothing I could do. I had to leave it there.

I couldn't believe it was real, I wanted to die. Who could have done this? It couldn't have been a tribe as we all live in harmony with the forest and have respect for it. I felt trapped, I wanted to stand and scream "Why?" Tears streamed down my face. 'Sarik, stop!' I told myself 'Remember you are a man now.' I thought back to what the chief had said. I wiped away my tears, took a deep breath and went to see Rolak.

Whilst I had been exploring this place of death and darkness, he had just stood, staring beyond the hill at the forest. I joined him and with one glance back, we began to walk down the hill, then we began to jog, then suddenly we were running, getting faster and faster. I collapsed at the foot of the hill, panting and exhausted. I threw myself out of the way as Rolak fell where I had just been lying. We stayed there till we caught our breath. The mud that I had fallen in before had dried and was beginning to crack and peel.

I knew where we were now, I'd been here before. The plants and animals were familiar; this comforted me slightly but I was still frightened. After what we'd seen at the clearing, we were ready to come across other things just as bad. We walked through the trees which were still dripping from the rain. I wanted to lay my heavy head on my mother's lap but I knew I couldn't. "I'm an adult, I have to be strong," I kept telling myself, 'I can't be a child again.'

I relaxed a little as we approached the village, but I couldn't help noticing that it was unusually quiet as we were just a few metres

away. I ignored this, I suppose I didn't want to think about it. My father had promised to send a party out to greet us. "Maybe we're late, so they've given up waiting and gone back..." I tried to comfort myself and Rolak. "Yes! That's it, that's why it's so quiet - because they're worried!" I hoped I was right.

Filling myself with hope, we stepped through the last trees - and stopped. I saw my mother's empty hammock gently swaying with the breeze, my father's bows and arrows scattered on the ground as they were this morning. There were no children playing or adults working, just a deadly silence.

[5]***Grumpy Man at 34*** [Y8]

"Mum," I said, "I'm going out."
I walked up our street, Edgehill, and knocked for Stephanie. We decided to come out on our bikes. I had just got a new one for Christmas. As we rode down the road, two of our other friends were out - Divya and Caroline. There was a group of us - a lot of them older than me.

We started having races round the block of our street. After a few races, the old grumpy man at number 34 came out, his name was Mr Jones. He walked up to us and told us we were not allowed to play on our bikes. Bobby, one of the older boys couldn't take all this, so he went up to Mr Jones and shouted "Oh, go away!" Mr Jones started to hit Bobby with his walking stick and pushed him away.

Everyone went in, except me and Steph. We got a ball and started to play Kerby, when Mr Jones came out. He walked over to my house, limping on his right leg, using the walking stick to support him. My mum answered the door and listened to his lecture about how we were not allowed to play ball out in the street. She didn't want to hear all this, so she slammed the door in his face.

He started limping back, when my dad came out and shouted at Mr Jones "Oh, go away! My kids and their friends can play out here if they want to."

"No they can't!" Mr Jones said.

"They aren't allowed to do anything," my dad said sarcastically.

With that, Mr Jones started to hobble back to his bungalow, giving us flinty looks.

That night, some of the older boys, including Bobby, decided to get their own back on Mr Jones. So they took his For Sale sign and dumped it in a bush at the end of the road.

The next day he came out while we were playing and said "How am I supposed to sell my house with all you kids around here making a noise?"

I told my mum what he had said and she said "It's his fault for moving into a street with four bedroomed houses."

He still looks out of his window but he never comes out to bother us....

[6]***House War Three*** [Y8]

One dark, creepy, spooky, cold night on Hallowe'en, me and my friends went out to make a bit of cash. We went out with sheets over our head. Well, we went out dressed up as ghosts. Well, at the end of the night we made £18.00 and 4 apples, 9 chocolate bars and 6 cans of coke.

At the end of the night, James said "We will go to one more house."

Well, we knocked on the door and suddenly, a cold bucket of water came over our head - so we run for it.

Not one person that night asked for a trick; they all gave us a treat, except this one person - the one who threw the bucket of water over us.

So we got two eggs and a bottle of fart gas.

Well, me and Paul hid in a bush and James knocked [on] the door. The man opened the door this time and James said "Trick or treat?"

So the man said "OK lad, I will give you a treat."

As he shut the door, me and Paul got out of the bush and sprayed the fart gas through the letter box and egged the windows. After that, we went back to my house and shared out the things we got.

The man was looking round the street for us.We went out to the street to have a look where the man was - and suddenly someone grabbed our shoulders. We turned around. It was the man who we sprayed fart gas through the letter [box] and egged the windows.

He said "Boys, why are you so nervous? And by the way, if you see some people with sheets over their heads, tell them to come and see me. I haven't given them their treat yet!"

[7]***Lost Underground Treasure*** [Y4]

It was a hot sunny day, I was bored so I went for a walk. Just then I bumped into my friend Faye. Faye was bored too, so she came with me. We went to the bridge. I saw a hole under the bridge. Then I looked down the hole. Then a stick went SNAP and I slipped down the hole, down and down.
When I landed with a bump 'Ouch' I whispered. Faye ran everywhere looking for me. I looked round and jumped to my feet. I felt smaller. I looked at myself, I was an elf! I was so surprised I hid behind a pebble. I saw people crying so I walked slowly up to them and tried to cheer them up. I asked what is wrong? An elf answered 'I am Marie. We lost our treasure. It's been in the family for years.'

'Never mind,' I said, 'I will help you find it but the hunt can't be long, people will be worried about me.'

'You will?'Marie jumped up and down, yelling 'This, um, girl ("Dorothy", I said) Dorothy, will help us find our treasure!'

Then all of the other elves said their names.

'I am Gonzo,'said one of the elves.

'I am Greybeard,' said an old elf.

'And I am Jearmy,' said a baby elf.

'Everybody, this is Dorothy,' said Marie.

'Well, we'd better get ready for the hunt,' said Greybeard.

Every elf was busy that day. Marie was cooking food. Jearmy and Gonzo went to gather firewood. I was looking for blankets and Greybeard was packing books so we wouldn't get bored.

The next day we set off at 6.00 o'clock in the morning. We climbed up a rope with all our stuff. When we got up, we were next to a train track. It was quite mucky. We saw lights. When it was green we crossed. Just then, I saw another elf trying to run but he just got stuck. We pulled him and he came unstuck.

'Thank you, I'm Bluebilly,' he said. We all said all our names.

'What are you doing?' Gonzo asked, when we got to the other side of the track.

'I was walking along, and a green Gremlin rushed past me holding a chest.'
Marie, Gonzo and myself looked at each other and sighed.

'That was our treasure,' said Greybeard.

'I will help you find it,' said Bluebilly.

'Thank you,' Marie said.

Then we all grabbed a rope (a coathanger hook was on the end of the rope). So we swung it round lots of times and the end landed on the edge. Then we climbed up a bank. When we got to the top, I rubbed my hands on my dress and said

'I'm hungry! Please can't we have breakfast?'

'Sure!' said Marie.

So we had breakfast and had a nap. Jearmy woke up and jumped on everybody. 'WAKE UP!' he shouted, 'WAKE UP!'
Then we all woke up and walked on.We walked quite a long way and then we all atarted running because the thief was very near us.

There was a wall near the thief and the wall was very long.

'Look! It's the Great Wall of China!' said Jearmy.

'Don't be silly,' Greybeard replied.

Now the wall was right next to the thief. He had a rope and swung it round and climbed to the top of the wall. He climbed up the wall. When he got to the top he was unbalanced and fell to his death!

Gonzo ran up and said 'HERE IT IS!' he shouted.

There was joys of happiness and Greybeard said 'When we get back we can have a party.'

When we got back, we had a huge party. There was lots of food and a lot of elves.

When the party had finished, I heard Faye's voice and I waved goodbye and said 'I will visit but I've got to go now.'Bye,' I sighed.

The Elves turned me back to my normal self and [I] climbed some stairs and went home and got undressed. And when I was getting undressed, I found an elf hat in my pocket, so it can't have been a dream!

THE END

[8]***Murder on the Moor*** [Y4]

'What are you doing today?' said Bess over the telephone.
'Nothing,' said Jodie.
'Fancy a walk on the moor?'
'Yeah, OK. I'll pick you up at about 11.00 am.'
'Bye.'

Jodie went to Bess's house in her red modern convertible. They had a lovely walk up the moor, the breeze blowing their hair back. But when they got to the top, Bess stepped in some blood... Jodie noticed it at once.

The young detectives looked around and all at once there in the bushes was a girl. She looked a right sight. Then they saw a knife and a metal pole. They did first aid but she was actually dead. Then they saw some footsteps in the mud. They followed them and came to a road. There were very faint tyre marks. They were just about to follow them when they suddenly remembered the girl. Shouldn't they do something, like get an undertaker. Bess ran to the nearest phone box while Jodie followed the tracks.

The tracks led to a house on 24 Crocknut Drive. It was a boarded up house with weeping dried up dead flowers in the garden. Jodie felt unsafe in this weary old house, she wanted Bess with her. Bess was a good friend on cases like this. Jodie wrote down the address, then went home where Bess was waiting for her. They had a Chinese take-away, then went to bed.

The next day they went to the house and knocked on the door. When they showed the man their detective cards, his face went all pale. Bess thought he was going to be sick, They asked him a few questions,

then said 'Bye' and went home.

The next day they went on the moor. They looked around and then in the bushes they saw his passport. 'Look!' said Jodie. It must have fallen out of his pocket.'

They went straight to the police. The police came with them to 24 Crocknut Drive and arrested him. They found out his name. It was Darbisher Jones.

'What a name!' said Bess when they got home.
'I know,' said Jodie.

They went to bed and dreamt about the day they had just had.

[9]***My Guilty Secret*** [Y8]

Blurb: *'I couldn't help myself. His blond hair was so perfect, his blue eyes sparkled and his smile was so sweet.'* Laura and I had been friends for years. We grew up together, but now, suddenly, almost overnight, we were 'teenagers'. Now all we ever talked about was fashion and boys.It all went wrong when Laura met Mark. They had been going out with each other for ages.... Then I got the phone call. It was him, I couldn't believe my luck... or could I?

*****

Mark, the boy of my dreams, was sitting next to me on the park swings, watching Laura, his girlfriend, riding round on her new bike. She got the bike for her birthday and was showing mark what she could do on it. Mark, to me, didn't seem very interested in what Laura was doing. Instead, he was staring around the field. Then he noticed that I was staring at him. I couldn't help myself - his blond hair was so perfect, his blue eyes sparkled and his smile was so sweet.

"What? Why are you staring at me?" he said in his deep, sexy voice.

"Oh sorry, I didn't mean to be," I said, feeling stupid.

Then Laura came over to us. "So then, what do you think Mark?" she said.

"Oh... um... it's great," he said.

I knew, as soon as he said it, that something was on his mind.

Laura rode off home. She had to be at her piano lesson at 6.00 pm and it was 5.50 pm now. Mark didn't even say goodbye to her but I don't think that she noticed.

"Mark, do you want to talk about it?" I asked after Laura was gone. I could still see him staring into space.

"What?" he said.

I looked at him in an awkward way.

"OK, it's Laura, I don't love her any more. I fancy someone else, but I don't want to let her down."

"Oh," I said, wishing that I hadn't asked him in the first place. With that, I told Mark that I had better go. He offered to walk me home. I would have jumped at the chance, but now that I knew that he loved someone else, I just wanted to be by myself.

I had just finished my tea and was about to do my homework when the phone rang.

"Hello," I said.

"Oh, um, hi. It's um..." said a voice that `I recognised.

"Who is this?" I asked, getting worried.

"It's Mark," he said.

"Is everything OK?"I asked, as he sounded a little worried.

"Yeh, sure, couldn't be better," he said with no confidence.

I waited for him to carry on but he didn't.

"Well what do you want?" I asked.

"It's um..." he didn't finish.

"Laura?" I said.

"Yes," he said.

He sounded different, like something was on his mind. Then I thought back to earlier and what i would do if he asked me to dump Laura for him. I couldn't, there was no way I could tell her, as she wouldn't believe me.

"Well," he carried on, "as I said before, I don't love her any more. I love someone else."

"Look, I don't want to get involved," I said, as I didn't want to know who that was.

I was just about to put the phone down when he said "It's you that I love, not Laura."

I couldn't believe what I heard.

"Don't be silly!" I said - hoping that it was true!

"But I do, you're the one that I love, I swear."

"Hold on - let me get this straight. You're dumping Laura for me?"

"Yes," he said.

I hung up as I was confused. I just sat on the stairs, not knowing what to do.

Laura and I were walking round the school field, talking about Mark. I hated the way she always went on about how wonderful he was. On this day I didn't seem to mind as much, because if what he said was true, then I would be with him pretty soon anyway. Then it sprang into my head, what would Laura say if I went out with him after he had dumped her? I would just have to explain to her that I had loved him for ages and that I couldn't miss out on this opportunity.

Then I noticed that Mark was coming over towards us. I could feel the guilt in my body, even though I hadn't done anything wrong.

"Hello ladies," said Mark.

Laura said "Hi," back but I just gave him a friendly smile.

"Do you mind if I join you?" he asked.

"No, not at all," Laura said.

That's when he started to walk next to me. We were walking for about ten minutes when I felt a hand holding mine. i looked down only to see it was Mark's. I looked at him. He smiled and I smiled back. I could feel all of this joy inside me just bursting to get out. It must have been true what he said on the phone last night. Then I felt his hand slip away and heard him say to Laura "Laura, I don't know how to say this to you but i don't love you any more and I want us to end."

Laura looked so hurt. I gave her a comforting smile. She looked at Mark then at me and ran off. I thought it would be best if I left her for a while.

Do you believe me now?" I heard Mark say.

He was serious. I couldn't believe my luck. Then Laura came back into my head again. She looked so hurt and I couldn't help feeling sorry for her but I loved Mark.

"Yes, I do," I said.

"And will you be my girlfriend?"

He sounded like he was proposing to me.

"Yes, I will," I answered.

"Great!" He sounded so pleased.

I had been waiting to ask Mark why he had dumped Laura. When I asked him, he told me he only dumped her because he wanted to be with me and not Laura.

I met Mark at the park later, and he gave me a kiss. Now I know why Laura said he was such a good kisser! We had a really good time at the park. We mainly talked about ourselves to get to know each other.

We were at school the next day and I was on my way to Art. That's when I saw Laura. I saw her coming towards me. I could feel all of this guilt inside me.

"Hi, Laura," I tried to say without looking too guilty.

She didn't reply.

"Is something wrong?" I asked.

"You could say that," she said sarcastically.

"Do you want to tell me about it?" I asked.

I knew that she knew about Mark and me, just by the way she looked at me.

"How could you do that to me? He was mine, all mine and you had to come along and mess it up for us. You're supposed to be my friend! I don't even know what he sees in you!" shouted Laura.

With that, she ran off crying, leaving me standing by the stairs with everyone staring at me. I still loved Mark, but I didn't want to lose Laura.

I thought about what had happened and what I had done. I also thought about what a good friend Laura had been to me in the past and when she had stuck up for me with the last boyfriend trouble that I had. Then I thought about how much I wanted to go out with Mark and how much I liked him. I knew Laura better than I did Mark. So in the end, I decided to just stay good friends with Mark and to make up with Laura. I was glad that I had made this decision as Laura and I had been through so much together.

[10]***Nowhere To Run*** [Y8]

I got up off the sofa and walked into the kitchen. Dad was sitting at the table finishing his supper. I finished ages ago, and so did Mum, but Dad had a car accident not long ago and has trouble eating and doing all the other things everybody else finds easy. It's been hard on all of us, especially Mum. But she does the best she can. At least that's what she says.

"Mum," I said, "can I go out for a while?"

"Not just now, Rachel, you've got a lot to do here first."

Great! Another thrilling evening doing what Dad says, I thought to myself. I didn't dare say it out loud. I went over to the sink to do the drying. It was overflowing with bubbles and dirty dishes. I picked up the salad dish, it was a really old one that's been passed down for generations and generations.

I put it in my right hand and picked up the tea towel in my left. I started drying it, listening in to Mum and Dad's conversation.

"I was thinking of popping round to see Rachel while she's at school," I heard Mum say, "just to see how she's getting on."

The dish slipped from my hand and crashed to the floor.

"Rachel!" Mum screamed at me. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

I bent down, tears stinging my eyes, and started picking up the broken pieces of glass. "Ouch!" I called out, cutting my hand on a sharp bit.

"Now what have you done?" Dad shouted at me. "Yuo're useless, you can't even do one simple thing without messing it up!"

That did it. I threw the bits of glass I had in my hand down onto the kitchen floor and ran out.

"Where are you going?" Mum called after me but she didn't follow me.

I ran upstairs and burst into my bedroom. I opened my wardrobe door and grabbed my rucksack, then went through my chest of drawers, grabbing thngs I would need. I looked around, there wasn't much space left in my rucksack but there were so many things I wanted to take. I eventually decided on a blanket from my bed, a few precious belongings I'd had since I was small, my watch which I put on and some toiletries. I quickly stuffed them into my bag and zipped it up. I glanced round the room to make sure there wasn't anything I had missed.

I ran down the stairs, making the least noise as possible. I got to the bottom and looked into the kitchen. Dad was still sitting at the table and Mum was sweeping up the floor where I had dropped the dish. I picked up my rucksack and crept out of the house unnoticed. I walked down to the end of the pathway and opened the gate. I took one last lingering look at the house before shutting it and hurrying off.

As soon as I was out of sight, I started to slow down.It felt great, I was out at last. I even felt more safe out here, knowing they wouldn't be shouting at me every time I made a small mistake. I shivered as the icy wind swept past me. I should have taken my scarf.

I had been walking down the street for about five minutes when I noticed that it had got much darker. The only light was coming from the street lamps and the pale moonlight. I nearly turned back, but remembering what they said to me kept me going. I'd really look stupid if they caught me sneaking back in, with a massive rucksack on my back.

I was just coming to the end of the street, when I heard a noise behind me. A sort of smothered cough. I turned quickly, scared of what I might see, but all I saw was a rustling in the hedge. It's

just the wind, I thought. I shoved my hands in my pockets and carried on to the end of the street, kicking the fallen leaves that were scattered on the ground.

Then I heard the noise again, the same noise as before. I turned round, quicker this time, and out of the corner of my eye I saw what I thought was a male figure dart into the nearest gap in the hedge.I froze.

I must have been standing there for quite a while before I decided what to do. There were acouple of houses around but no lights were on. If I screamed, someone would probably come out, but then I'd have to go home. I didn't want to take that risk. I started to carry on walking to the end of the road, then I turned right. I walked down the pathway quite quickly for a few seconds, before turning right again.I was now walking down another alleyway directly behind the houses. I could hear footsteps behind me so I knew someone was still there.

I was walking really fast now and my legs were starting to ache. My shoulder was also starting to hurt, so I took my rucksack off my left shoulder and slung it over the right. I could see a few yards ahead of me was ajunction in the alley. Maybe I can lose him here, I thought. I wasn't really sure which way to turn. I didn't have much time, so I quickly turned left and started to run.

I kept running and running, ignoring the pain in my side where a stitch had formed. Then I tripped, smashing my face on the hard concrete. I was in agony. I put my hand up to my face and touched it. It was soaked with blood and bits of gravel stuck in the wounds. I struggled to stand up. I've got to keep going! I couldn't get up. My legs kept collapsing underneath me. I started to cry. The salty tears mad e my face sting even more.

I could see the man, the follower, approaching me from around the corner. With one last effort, I tried to stand, willing my legs to do as they were told; but they wouldn't. I was stuck, I should have stayed at home. "Help!" I screamed, but no-one seemed to hear. "Help!" I screamed again - still nothing but silence.

Deathly silence.

[11]***Our Adventure!*** [Y4]

One day me and Lora were walking across a field. Suddenly Lora tripped over a stone. Someone walked past us. He or 'it' had a wizard suit on. I went up to the wizard. The wizard turned around and pointed his wand at me and we didn't quite catch the spell.

I always wanted to be a worm [and] Lora always wanted to be a mole. I felt funny. Lora said "I feel sick." I did too. I was lying down on the floor. I tried to get up but couldn't. I looked down. I was a worm and Lora was a mole.

Me and Lora started to dig holes. We got deeper and deeper until it got hotter and hotter. My skin started to peel off. I knew we were getting closer to the centre of the earth. Our teachers Mrs A and Mrs

S taught us all about it.

We decided to turn back. Lora and me brought some stones back from the centre of the earth. Everyone was amazed.

Of course the wizard turned us back!

[12]***Personalities*** [Y8]

Blurb: In the Games Room something happens... something that will change Russell's life - FOREVER! (Well, for a weekend at least.) *Personalities* is about a group of boys, whose lives we follow for a weekend of fun, sorrow, laughter!

"Over 'ere Gib," I shouted.

Gib lofted the ball expertly to the area, I rose to meet it. The ball cannoned off my forehead, straight into the back of the net. All Peter could do was stand and watch. This was how we spent most of our weekends. We go away in our caravans and play football nearly all the time.

"Ian?" Russell whined.

"What?" I shouted.

"Go in goal?"

"NO WAY!"

"I won't play any more."

"GOOD!"

at this, Russell went off crying to his Mum. He is just so sad!

"Hey, Andy..."

"Yeh?"

"You going to the disco?"

"Yeah."

"You reckon Russell and Guy will be there?"

"What? The dweebs of the Year?"

"Yeah!"

"Don't care!"

"See ya there."

Andy and James walked off, so Gib, Peter and I carried on playing for a bit.

"You going to the Old Oak?"

"Nah!"

Then we went to watch TV.

*****

"Andy!" I yelled.

"Righ Ian," he shouted back.

"D'ya want a hand up there?"

"Yeah, okay."

"Fine."

I climbed up onto the stage and started to select a couple of decent songs. Andy was sitting behind the decks with a light shining on him from behind.

"STUPID THINGS!" said Andy, banging the decks.

"Wossup?" I asked.

"STUPID THING WON'T WORK'

"Turn the amp on then."

Andy turned the amplifier on and *No Good, Start The Dance* started playing.

"Cool..."

about five songs later, people started arriving.

"Wanna beer?"

"Yeah, go on, might as well."

Anthony lobbed up two cans of beer and put the rest on the table. Everybody was now there and the oldies were there in their hundreds! (so I exaggerated a bit.)

"We'd better slow it down a bit," I murmured.

"Yeah."

The next song was supposed to be *Swamp Thing* but instead it was the *Gay Gordons* (whoever they may be) and all the oldies headed for the floor.

"Hahahahahaha!" Andy was cracking up!

"WHAT?"

"Look at Russell!"

Suddenly, everyone was laughing and pointing at Russell. I looked up to see why. Russell was dancing with Melanie. (Now this may not seem bad to you, but Russell's 18 and Melanie's 4.)

Finally, Russell realised what was going on and ran off... crying.

The night carried on fine. Mum and Dad made prats of themselves... as usual, But I guess I'd rather have mad parents than boring old farts!

During the course of the night, loads of stuff happened like me and Kate dancing and Andy getting in a stress with me, but who cares?

*****

The Next Day
Andy walked in, shades on.

"ALL RIGHT,ANDY?" I yelled right in his ear!

"Yeah, I'm fine," he said, whipping off the shades. "Ha! Thought I'd have a hangover didn't you?"

"Yeah!"

"Fancy a game of pool?"

"Go on then."

Andy totally demolished me... ME, champion of my local youth club!

"Can no-one take me on?"

Andy said this in one of those really weird voices that you can get on cheap films like *The Power Rangers*.

"Yeah, yeah, I will," said a quiet voice.

Everyone whirled round to see who it was that had offered this challenge. It was Russell.

Russell walked up to the table and put in the money. It was 40p, I mean, what a rip-off! Russell thrashed Andy. At one stage, Andy was winning by three balls to two but Russell eventually beat him. Everyone was so surprised that they walked off. I went up to Russell and asked him how he'd done it.

He just said "Practice," and walked off.

None of us could believe that the dweep of the year had won! I mean Russell never won a thing (well, unless you're counting winning the 10-18 years section of the fancy dress contest). He was dressed as a banana and the other kid was dressed as a fairy

"I reckon," said Pete, "that he's changed."

"Yeah - like us now," murmured James.

"Ummmm, I suppose so," added Andy.

"I know, let's vote," said Pete.

(Honestly, the kid's obssessed with democracy!"

"Okay," there were murmurs of agreement from all around the room.

Everyone voted he was different, so we all went to play football with Russell. The game went on for a while, when suddenly Russell went down. Gib yelled out "Penalty!" Russell got up, walked to the spot, placed the ball and told me to get ready. I did. Bang! The ball went up towards the top right corner. I jumped, reached, stretched... and missed it. I couldn't believe it, in all the 12 years I'd known him, he'd never even scored, but now... well! It was getting dark, so we all went in.

*****

The next day we all went to an old oak tree that Gib knew about - that is Andy, Gib,Peter, James, Russell and I. Guy tried to follow us but we lobbed conkers at him. Then he tried creeping up on us, but with ginger hair you can see him a mile off.

"Oh no," said Andy sarcastically.

"What?" we asked.

"I've bust those stupid glasses of Guy's."

At this, everyone cracked up, even Russell, who also wore glasses. This was because Guy had these pink glasses with square lenses!

"Come on," said Russell, "let's go play pool."

Pete replied that he didn't have any money.

Russell said "I'll shout ya."

So off we went to play pool. When we got there, Guy was in one of those Postman Pat vans - you know, the ones that rock in time with the music - and he was singing along with it! When he realised we were watching him, he covered his face and got out of the other side, but Andy was on top of the van and put pool chalk in Guy's hair. As they say in the adverts "From bright orange to stunning blue in one easy step".

Guy ran for it but because he was so fat, he could only waddle like a duck with blu-tac on his feet and its head sellotaped to its bum! Andy pulled Guy along 'til we reached the lake, then he thrust Guy's head underneath the water. When his head came back up his hair had turned pink!

Guy went off crying to his Mum.When he went offf, we noticed that because he had been so scared, he had wet himself.We all found this really funny and fell about laughing. Guy looked back and we saw that he was bright pink where the chalk had run.

And so the circle started again. I suppose soon Guy will be like us - but who knows?

[13]***Rowanne's Adventures*** [Y6]

It was a beautiful spring day. Rowanne was busy in Wizard Balard's laboratory. Balard was a skilled wizard and he left Rowanne in charge of everything while he was visiting his cousin Merlin, who was the king's wizard. The laboratory was in a hollow oak tree. It had a stone floor [and] a table, which had experiments, spellbooks and things on it.It had candle holders attached to the walls with lit candles. Shelves surrounded the room. It had a blackboard and black beams. There were some black stairs leading up to a landing which was like a balcony which overlooked the rest of the laboratory. There were three black doors, one door to Balard's room, one to Rowanne's room and one to the bathroom.

Rowanne stood in the laboratory; she selected a book from one of the bookshelves, pulled it out and laid the heavy book on the table. It was the Goldstar complete guide to healing powers. She opened the book to the contents *Touch healing, making healing medicine.* "Aha! Getting healing powers, page twelve," said Rowanne aloud to herself.

She flicked her fingers over the pages. "Two teaspoons of sugar and parsley cream; one teaspoonful of strawberry and camomile liquid; stir in gently, adding five teaspoons of wild black cherry and orangegrove powder, one teaspoon at a time," said Rowanne. She did all this and stirred it in her large black cauldron. "Then rub into fingers and say (while concentrating) 'As high as a tower and have power,'" said Rowanne.

Rubbing the soft, slimy substance into her fingers, Rowanne repeated the magic words.Then there was a sudden flash of light and the ground seemed to shake. Rowanne felt all warm inside. For some reason she looked down at her feet. She leaped back as she realised she had skin-changed into a red dragon. The spell had gone wrong.

She suddenly felt depressed and scared - what would Balard do when he found out? He was nice most of the time but he took his magic extremely seriously. The only thing she could do was run away. She would travel and have an adventure. She got her wizard's bag and packed a few things: spell books, magic potions, clothes, a dagger and bow and arrows. Since Balard had been away, nothing had gone wrong. It had probably been better than when Balard was there. But after this he would never give her her degree.

She pinned a note on Balard's door which said '
dear Balard, I have left you.One day I will return and tell you why.
From your faithful apprentice, Rowanne.'

She turned back to normal but she knew she would turn back into a

dragon. She tied her wizard's bag onto her horse's saddle and tacked up her horse, Arianne, a pure white Spanish mare, and started off on her long journey, not knowing what adventures were in front of her. She stopped late that night, gathered some sticks and lit a fire, tied Arianne to a tree and drifted off to sleep.

She woke that morning to find some dwarfs peering down at her. She leaped up.
"Ou are you?" asked a fat dwarf holding a lantern. Rowanne grabbed her bag from a small, skinny dwarf who was peering through it and said "I'm sorry to have to correct you on your English ' it's 'Who are you?' and the answer to that question is that I am an evil sorceress and if you don't scatter right now, then I will turn you into frogs and use you for testing on!"

The dwarfs soon ran after that, except for the small, skinny one who said in a squeaky voice "I've always wanted to be a frog." But he was soon grabbed by the others in a stampede to run away.

Rowanne walked down to a nearby river with all her belongings, with Arianne following. She washed, but thought she heard something coming from a group of trees. She gathered up her things and pointed her bow and arrow through the trees, but lowered it and entered the trees. She found a man dressed in rusty armour. He was her age. He had long, brown hair. The sky was black and the wind blew quite violently.

She approached the knight. "Is everything all right?" asked Rowanne, sliding her fingers through her soft, blond hair.

"No, everything is not all right," he replied, looking up at her.

She stood still and looked at him. His eyes were red and bloodshot.He looked as though he hadn't slept for a hundred years. She went and sat by him.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

He didn't reply.

"I ran away," said Rowanne.

"Why?" He turned to look at her.

"Well, I worked as an apprentice wizard. I made a spell go wrong by accident and now I can skin-change myself into a dragon," replied Rowanne.

There was silence.

"I was in love with Demetrias, the King's daughter. She was caught by Vernon Firebrass, the evil dragon. Whoever saved her, took her hand in marriage. It was me against Sir Howard, the brave knight. It was no contest, so I left," said the knight.

"You should have tried," said Rowanne.

"And been humiliated?" said the knight.

"What's your name?" asked Rowanne.

"Dan Lawrence," replied the knight. "What's yours?"

"Rowanne."

"What's your second name?" asked Dan Lawrence.

"I don't have one. I was abandoned. Balard, who's training me to be a wizard, found me and brought me up. I'd better be getting on," said Rowanne, standing up.

"Where are you heading?" asked Dan Lawrence.

"I'm looking for adventure. The fact that I can skin-change into a dragon might help," said Rowanne.

"No, don't go... will you... will you help me to save Demetrias?" asked Dan Lawrence.

Rowanne paused. "Where's Vernon?" she asked.

"On Ramon mountain. So will you help me?"

"Of course," said Rowanne.

Later that day they started on their adventure to save Demetrias. His horse was called Haswick. That night they carried lanterns.They stopped at an inn. For breakfast that morning they had a jar of honey. They continued to travel. They travelled for many days, stopping at forests and inns.

Eventually they arrived at Ramon Mountain. Rowanne said the magic words backwards and she turned into a dragon just the way she first did in Balard's laboratory not so long ago. With Dan on Haswick and Rowanne as a dragon they rode up the mountain. They reached the dragon's cave. He was sitting outside. Vernon leapt up in surprise, his green body shining like gold in the warm sun.Dan rode past as Rowanne and Vernon pounced, scratching each other and scorching each other with flames. Dan charged up behind Rowanne and stabbed him with his sword. Vernon fell to the ground.

Dan lifted Demetrias onto his horse and they galloped down the hill in triumph. Rowanne turned herself back to normal and mounted her horse Arianne. They separated, Demetrias and Dan Lawrence rode back to the castle and Rowanne rode back to Balard's laboratory , deciding to confess all and hope he would forgive her. By now, it was Autumn. The leaves covered the ground like a patchwork quilt. Rowanne untacked Arianne and knocked on the door. Balard opened it. They cuddled each other and sat down by the fire. He was pleased to see her. Rowanne told Balard everything. He was impressed. He made her a real wizard.

Rowanne and Balard went to visit the king. Rowanne was made the

king's wizard. Dan married Demetrias and was knighted. Rowanne was pleased for him and they often talked together - and one day, Sir Dan Lawrence and Demetrias would become king and queen.

[14]***Stranded*** [Y8]

I squinted as the bright sunlight pierced the bright entrance of the dark alley, as I scrambled out of the large cardboard box (kindly supplied by Somerfield) and I stepped into the brightness of the main road. As the heat of the sun rushed to my face, a sudden pain hit my back. I swiftly turned and saw a glimpse of the huge, richly dressed man who had struck me in the back.

"GET OUT OF MY WAY YOU UGLY LITTLE BASTARD I'M IN A HURRY!" the man shouted with a high pitched Scottish accent. Scrambling back into the alley, I finished off a whole bag of rizz which I usually kept in a polythene bag in a slash n my coat so the drug police would have less chance of catching me. The huge blast of the drug was only supposed to be taken in small enough quantities to give you a high for an hour. The recommended dosage for rizz was half a teaspoonful, which made the amount I'd taken look like a Guiness bumper pack instead of a very small can. I stumbled to the ground and blacked out.

*****

"Let's face it, Everton, you was a slob," said Larson.

"I know," said Everton "but that's all in the past now, thank God."

Everton yawned despondently. He rang a bell for the second time.

"Coming sir," said the maid with her shrill voice.

"The best bottle of Chablis."

"Anything else, sir?"

"Oh yes, some strawberries to bring out the flavour."

Aristotle entered the room.

"Hi!" he shouted loudly. "So what's new?"

"What's new?" said Everton questioningly.

"Yeh, what's hip? What's happening?"

"Well I am afraid to tell you, Aristotle, we are in a total state of non-hippness and have not an ounce of happeningness in the room - so do leave the men to do men's things," said Everton tiresomely.

"All right, all right, keep your hair on! You're getting to be such a grouch lately."

Everton just grunted, as he dipped his large hand into the bowl of strawberries beside him.

"You used to be so much fun - in fact, I remember you saying you'd rather die than become one of those fat, ugly, rich bastards you used to hate when you were on the streets. No wonder Mum left you."

"Don't talk to your father like that, Aristotle," said Larson.

"Why not? And the amount of time you spend with him, I'm starting to think he prefers the company of men."

"I'm his lawyer, your Dad's getting a divorce, I've got to spend time with him."

"And whose fault was the divorce then? Mum would never have left us if he hadn't been such a bastard."

Everton raised his voice for once: "YOU DON'T TALK TO ME OR JOHN LIKE THAT." His face went red. "GOT THAT?" he screamed.

"Yes," said Aristotle sheepishly.

"Right," said Everton a bit more calmly. "A little more respect in future.

Aristotle left the room.

"If you lose your temper like that, it wouldn't look exactly great in court," said Larson.

"I know my rights, it'll be a breeze," said Everton confidently.

"I just hope you're right."

Ring ring... ring ring...

"I'll get it," came aristotle's voice from the other room. He walked to the little table and picked up the phone.

"Hello," he said.

"Hi," said a very bored voice on the other line.

"Oh hi, Ryaly, how're you doing?"

"OK I spose, listen have you done that assignment on Ancient Greece yet?"

"Yeah, well most anyway."

"Have you got up to question seven?"

"Yeah, I'm on ten, it's impossible."

"Well on seven, what's this crap about Zeus?"

"It'll take ages to tell you. Hey, could you come round here later

and borrow mine, then copy it."

"Thanks."

"As long as I get it back."

"What time should I come then?"

"Well, my Dad's in a right mood at the moment, so come in about half an hour to let him cool down."

"All right then, see you later."

"See yous."

Aristotle went in to watch TV.

"Turn that racket down would you?" said Everton.

"It's not a racket, it's music."

"Well it's giving me a headache."

"So go upstairs then!" snapped Aristotle.

"All right, if it makes you happy, I will."

"Well go then."

"I'm gone."

Everton pushed his way out of the room with an enraged face.He walked through the doorway to his bedroom and slammed the door behind him. Lying on his bed he began to think how things were before, when he met Jude. From that day on, he had had the best of his life. That was until the divorce, until his wife had caught him having a secret liason with his secretary, Beth. He realised that he had been stupid now. Boom! and then another huge boom. A vision flashed before his eyes again and again, then silence. He'd been having flashes like that for ages now - not long after his wife left him. But this one was stronger, more vivid. What did he see? A light, looking upwards at a white ceiling and wired sprouting in all directions. There was also a sound in the room, beep,,, beep... beep, a hospital monitor. A hospital, that's it, a hospital, he was lying in a hospital with an assortment of wires coming out of his body. Why was he having these flashes? Am I seeing the future, one of those wierd science fiction things? I'd better start readng my horoscope, he thought. He went downstairs.

Brrringgg.

Everton opened the door.

"Oh, hi Curt what can I do for you?"

"I just came by for a chat, not disturbing you am I?"

"Not at all, come in."

"Thanks."

"Anyway, I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Oh yeah, what's that?"

"Come upstairs and I'll tell you."

*****

"Well, what do you think I should do then?"

"I think you should see a doctor, a psychiatrist or something you know," said Curt vaguely.

"No, I don't know what you're on about."

"Well, as you said before, it could be something to do with your age - no offence nor nothing."

"Hey, that's quite a good idea, actually, thanks."

"No problem, but I'd better get back now as Lind's expecting me home for tea."

"OK, I'll see you soon - as long as these flashes aren't some fatal disease."

"Oh yeah, let me know about that. Well, see you."

Everton went down to the telephone. He picked up the receiver and dialled.

"Hello, Clerical Medical, how can I help you?" came the shrill voice on the other line.

"I'd like to make an appointment."

"Which doctor would you be after?"

"Doctor Crumley please."

"I'll just see when Mr Crumley is available OK?"

"OK."

"Yes, the soonest you'll be able to see him is next Tuesday, does that suit you sir?"

"Yes, that'll be fine."

"I'll put you down for 2.40."

"OK, thank you."

Everton slammed down the receiver.

*****

Everton slouched in the corridor of the restautrant.

"Just five minutes, no problem," the waiter had said.

That was two hours ago.He decided to go back. It was where he belonged. How long had he been here? It must have been years. Everyone must have changed, he must have changed or would he look the same as in this Universe? A universe of his mind. A part of his brain connected with plasure, a drug induced fantasy. Huh! Some fantasy! Great!
a divorce, his kid hating him... but no, Aristotle didn't hate him right from the start. In fact at the start of his fantasy, everyone had thought he was brilliant in more ways than one. He'd started hating himself so much that it started to show in his fantasies. Life sucked in more than one universe, Everton concluded. But at least he was going for treatment the next day.

*****

Darkness and then light, not a bright light, quite shadowed. He opened his eyes. White, just as in his flashes, but more sound. He tried to turn his head but couldn't. He could hear the whirring noise of machinery all around him. He was lying front up in the bed, so he was more or less sitting.

"Hwdy doody do! Welcome to Clerical Medical Service.Have a nice coma - I did!" chirped the happy robot.

"You're talking," said Everton weakly.

"Woh! We've got ourselves a bright one here."

"Computers can't talk - well not yet, anyway."

"Well what do you think you're talking to sugar?"

"How long have I been out then?"

"Well let's just say long enough for the sun to die and the human race to have evacuated the planet."

"Why am I so young then? Why am I still on earth?"

"Well as for you still being young, you're part of an experiment in time freezing. They wanted your body to stay the same while your mind greww. That's also why you were in a coma for so long. As for the second question, the experiment didn't work. As the rest of the human race evacuated the planet, there wasn't enough room on the transport ship to take any of the lame, mad, sick or dying. You were put in all of these categories.

"So there are other people out there then?"

"No, they all died as we were sucked into the sun's black hole. You're the last human in our galaxy."

"Yeah, but how come I didn't die as we were sucked into this black hole?"\\"Well, you've been in suspended animation. This room you were in has a special radioactive film around it which stopped you dying. The only hitch is, the earth was reduced with everything on it to the size of a garden pea, that includes us."

Everton shut his eyes and tried to make it all sink in. After thinking, Everton knew what he had to do. Trembling, he pulled the lead from his heart.

[15]***The Big Match*** [Y6]

The big match started tomorrow and the team were getting ready for it. They were playing at Wembley and they had plenty of work to do. They were playing Man United - boooo.

The next day they ran out onto the pitch and started to practise and McLeish said "We're going to win this match, all right?"The team all said "Yes".They all got into position and the big match began.

By the second half, they were 1-0 down and the weather was bad. After a while, McLeish scored. Now they were drawing 1-1. McLeish ran it up the field and got hacked by Gigs. He went off on a stretcher and Giggs got sent off and the crowd cheered.

Viny Jones had a penalty - he shot - he scored! The crowds leapt - they were winning! The ref blew his whistle for the kick off. Man United tried to score but had no time left. We had won the cup!

When we were back at the club we went straight down the pub and had a party and got drunk.

[16]***The Deceiver*** [Y8]

Blurb: "Can't you remember last night when you knifed a man?" Was my friend Francis really talking to me? I know I had been drinking but I would never kill someone. Or would I? When a young man wakes up and finds that he is a murderer, all he can do is run, but where to? Was it really him - or was he framed?

"Get up, you fool, get up!" Francis said. The words only just got through to me. It was quite hard to hear in the musty,sweaty room where I slept.As I rose, I saw the familiar faces of my shipmates which I could hardly see because it was so dark. We were all in port for a few days after one of our sails had been ripped in a violent storm. We had been drinking hard the night before; my head hurt and I couldn't remember how I had got back on board.

"What do you want, Francis, you noisy sod?" I mumbled back to him. Francis was a good friend of mine. He always did wretched things to me and abandoned me every time I was in trouble, but for some strange reason, we always stayed friends.

"Don't you noisy sod me. I"m not the one in trouble!"

"Who is then? And don't speak so loud," I said, a bit more interested.

"Can't you remember last night when you knifed that man? Jimmy Tarbute his name was. Yo remember, in the alley, when you were drunk."

"Are you saying I killed someone?" I said surprised.

"Well, that's not really the problem," Francis said.

"Not the problem! Not the problem! I could be hanged for that!" I almost screamed.

Everyone looked round.

"What are you looking at?" I said.

Everyone looked away.

"No, the real problem is that Jimmy Tarbute's brother is coming after you. He knows what you look like. He saw the whole murder," said Francis.

"Oh, great! So I've got a mad brother after me and I'll probably have the coastguard after me soon," I replied in despair.

"Well, get up,put your breeches on and you'll get a head start."

I got changed and we walked through the ship to the deck. It was a damp morning, and the sails hung limply from the mast. On land, the fishmongers were yelling at each other as they set up market for the day. At one of the stalls two men were talking. One of them pointed to our ship and the other gave him some money and started walking towards us.

"Quick! That's him, the one who's after you. Look, the one walking towards the ship!" Francis said.

"I know, I can see him," I replied.

"Well run! Get away! He's coming!"

"What about my stuff?""Leave it! Just run! Run!"

I did just that. I sprinted down the gang plank, hurdled a crate of fish, and was off.

I ran swiftly through the cobbled streets, through lanes and alleyways, though I had no idea of where they would take me. I ran into a dark lane. The wooden-beamed houses towered above me. It was a dead end. As I stopped, I skidded on some mossy ground, tripped and my head smacked into the slippery cobbles. It was dark. I don't know

for how long, but when I awoke I was in the same dark, wet lane. I was pulling myself to my feet. As I rose, a tall, dark figure stepped into the alleyway with me.

"Before I kill you, tell me why you did it."

The deep, booming voice sent a shiver straight to my heart.

"I didn't mean it, I was drunk," I said, shaking.

"Not a good enough reason," the deep voice replied. The man raised his sword, then stopped. "What happened to your hair?" he asked.

"What about my hair?" I said.

"It's not black any more. Last night it was black," he said, puzzled. "I can't be you who killed my brother. He was your build, about the same height as you but he had black hair - and yes, he had a scar on his right cheek," the man said.

Absent-mindedly I replied "That sounds exactly like my friend Francis."

"Like who?" the big man yelled at me with his hand on my throat. "Where does this francis live?" he yelled again.

"Oh, I lost contact w-with him years ago," I stuttered to the big man.

"Where does he live?" he yelled again, tightening his grip.

"All right, all right, he's on a ship that came into port two days ago."

"Right, you're coming with me." The big man dragged me back through the streets.

"By the way, what's your name?" I questioned.

"Well, if you want to know, it's Belrick," he said.

"I can walk you know," I said.

Belrick let go grudgingly. The sun had started to come out. It was mid-morning and I was feeling sick. I needed a drink. We had just passed a tavern.

"Er, Belrick, I'm feeling a bit ill, don't worry about me, I'm just going to get a drink," I said.

"No."

"Please,I'm desperate," I begged.

"All right, one, quickly, but that's it."

The tavern was dark and smelly. There were wood chippings on the floor and a rough looking man serving drinks at the bar. We strode up to the bar.

"Two ales please," Belrick said.

"That will be four groats please" the barman said in a gruff voice. Surprisingly, Belrick paid for me. We went and sat in a corner. This was the first time I had really looked closely at Belrick. He had a weathered face, a ginger beard and a moustache, long, plaited hair and he wore a slightly ripped chain mail shirt.You didn't see many mail shirts these days. It was all breastplates.

After our drink we went back to the ship.When we were on board we couldn't find a trace of Francis. I asked where he was. Someone said he'd taken all his possessions and headed for a cave to the north.

"I know where it is," said Belrick.

We both ran through the town and onto a beach. The sun was shining now. It was mid-day. There was a small opening to a cave in the rock face. "Here it is, we should wait here, whilst our eyes get accustomed to the light."

We were in the entrance to a cave for about a minute and then our eyes slowly got used to the light. The cave was wet and slippery. There was a ridge of rock and then a pool of water. This water went out to sea. At the edge of the rock stood Francis. His head was just below a stalctite next to a little rowboat.

"This place would be perfect for smuggling," I said to Belrick.

Francis turned around, gobsmacked, he couldn't believe I was still alive.

"Stay back, I've got a gun," Francis said, as he swung round and picked up a double-barrelled pistol. "Put your hands up, up!" Francis said. We reluctantly put our hands in the air.

"Why did you kill my brother?" Belrick said loudly. His voice echoed round the cave.

"Because your poor excuse for a brother raped my sister if you have to know," Francis replied spitefully. Francis edged backwards towards the row boat filled with supplies. He almost tripped on it but managed to stay up. He got in and pushed the boat out onto the water, still with the gun pointed at us. When he nearly got out of the cave he dropped the gun and started rowing. Belrick bent down and picked up a stone. He threw it as hard as he could. It ricochetted off the roof of the cave and echoed for a few seconds. He started to runtowards the water. I tried my hardest to stop him. "Belrick, stop!" I yelled.

He slowed down slightly. "How can he accuse my brother of something

I know he didn't do?" Belrick said, his fists clenched.

"How do you know he didn't do it?" I replied.

"Look, it just isn't him, all right?" With that Belrick stormed out of the cave. I saw Belrick's figure outside, dark and menacing. He looked down, escaping the glare of the sun. Suddenly he looked round and stared running towards the sea. I ran out. My eyes hurt from the sun but I could just make out Belrick, waist deep in the sea, waving his fist and cursing at a small row boat in the distance.

A few days later, Belrick and I were walking along the beach. It was a cold morning and there was a chill in the air, even though the sun was shining. There was a dribbling trail of sick along the beach. I tried to avoid looking at it - Belrick had been drinking heavily since we came out of the cave and now the after effects were catching up with him.

We scrambled over some rocks."Wait a minute," said Bellrick with a saliva-filled mouth, "there's a row boat over there.

"I see," I said. There was a row boat covered in seaweed on the rocks next to us.

"It could be his," I said.

"What, Francis's? Not likely," Belrick replied.

"It is, look! Hee's some of the supplies at the bottom. I remember them from the cave!" I said, excited.

"You're right, he must still be in the town. But why would he stay if he knows we're after him?"

"Come on! Let's get back, we might still be able to catch him."

We went back to the town on the windy, dusty road. The chill in the wind had gone and the walk back up the hill was quite refreshing. It was a Wednesday and the markets were closed. It was nice not to have the fishmonger yell down your earhole all morning.

"At least the pubs are open," said Belrick happily.

"No, no pubs. I don't want you out of your head when we find Francis,"I replied sharply.

Belrick's smile turned to a frown, then he suddenly said "I've got it - if we go to the pubs we could get some information." He was right there. One thing I knew about Francis was he loved pubs.

"All right, we can go. Now I think about it, Francis mentioned something about a pub called 'The Cannon Hall' - no, 'The cannon Ball' that was it!

"You don't want to go there, it's horrible. It's infested with rats," Belrick replied with distaste.

"Look, we're going there and that's that." I sounded like a ship's captain giving orders.

We walked through dark alleyways and cobbled streets. The part of the town we came to seemed very poor. The guters stank. We came to The Cannon Ball Inn and stood outside for a while trying to build up courage to go inside. It was a dull wooden building. The sign was covered in muck and there was a pile of rusty cannon balls to the side of the door. We walked in. Smoke was hanging in the air. It smelt worse in here than in the gutters.

"This place stinks," belrick said, putting his hand to his nose. The bar was made of oak along with the ceiling and floor. The walls were white-washed but you could hardly see that from all the stains. We went up to the bar.

"Hello, I'm looking for a man named Francis. You wouldn't happen to have heard of a man like that? Black hair, about my build..." I inquired.

"Depends who you are, don't it?" the barman said.

"My friend said do you know Francis?" Belrick yelled down the man's throat, grabbing him by the collar and yanking him across the bar.

"Er, er yes, he's down in the cellar," the barman stuttered.

"Thank you so much," Belrick replied, letting him go.

The barman gasped for breath.

"It's over there, in the corner," the barman said as he fumbled for a bottle of whisky.

As we walked towards the cellar door, the barman jumped the bar and ran out of the door. I turned and started to chase him.

"Stop! He doesn't matter, as long as Francis is in the cella," Belrick said. As he said this, he opened the door to reveal an unused cupboard full of brooms.

"Come on!" I said, "He'll lead us to Francis. We both ranafter him. He didn't realise we were chasing, so he slowed to a walk. We followed in his pattern, keeping our distance. He walked into a small tunnel between two houses. We followed, there was aT junction. He looked right, then turned left and started running.

"Come on, let's go!" I said to Belrick. We started running, turned the corner and saw the barman nip down some stairs and slam the door behind him. Belrick and I ran up to the door and skid-stopped.

"I'm gonna break it down," Belrick said, taking his sword from his sheath and tearing apart the lock on the door before I could do anything. Belrick then flung open the door. We were at the top of a wooden staircase leading down to a dimly lit room. It was quite large

and packed with casks of whisky. The walls were brick and the only light was coming from two torches attached to them. There were three people in the room - the barman, a man stacking casks of whisky in the corner, and Francis.

"That's him, boss. That's the one I told you about and there's his friend, the big one," the barman said to Francis.

"Ther's the vile rogue!" shouted Belrick, running down the stairs. The barman backed off into a corner but before belrick could strike, Francis whipped out his pistol and pointed it at Belrick.\\"Stop right there, you fat fool, before I blast you full of lead."

"All right, all right," Belrick said as he raised his hands.

The man in the corner started running towards the stairs.

"AAARRRGGHH!" I screamed at the top of my voice.

Francis spun around, his pistol pointing at me. At that, Belrick jumped on top of Francis. "You murderer!" yelled Belrick, as he smashed Francis to the floor. The man on the steps kept running. I turned and kicked him in the mouth. He fell back and crashed down the stairs. Two of the steps broke as he fell and then he lay still at the bottom. The barman was still in the corner, shaking with fright. By now, Belrick had Francis up against the far wall. He was giving him body blows and Francis was gasping for breath. I ran down the steps towards Belrick.

"No, don't kill him. I need to know why he did it," I yelled. I could only just stop Belrick. Francis fell to the floor, scraping the ground, trying to just get one good breath of air.

"Why did you do it, you pig?" I said to Francis.

"Can't you see? Can't you guess? It's the smuggling you fool, Jimmy Tarbute found out about my smuggling. I had to kill him," said Francis.

"And you just used me as a way to get out of it, you low life little..." I didn't finish the sentence.

"What about the rape?" Belrick said. Just as he did, the barman ran up the stairs through the door.

"Leave him," I said.

"Well, what about the rape? You said my brother raped your sister," Belrick said again.

"I lied, I don't even have a sister, you gullible twit!"

That was it. Belrick snatched up the pistol from the floor, swung round and blasted Francis through the head. The noise echoed through the room and the tunnel, making it sound ten times louder than it was. When the smoke had cleared, you could see the blood-stained face

of Francis sitting on the floor. I turned away. To think I used to be his friend.

"Come on, let's go," I said.

Belrick dropped the gun and we both walked towards the stairs. I checked on the man who was lying still. He was dead. We shut the door behind us. The bodies would probably never be found.

"What about the barman?" I thought out loud.

"God, you're right!" Belrick said.

We ran back to The Cannon Ball Inn. No-one was there. I opened the door at the back of the room. I looked away and shut the door. "He's hanged himself," I said to Belrick. This was just too much for me. I grabbed a bottle of whisky and smashed it open. I poured it down my throat. Belrick also grabbed a bottle and started drinking. It had been a long day.

A week or so later, we were in a pub. ON the bar there was a newsheet. It said 'Three days ago a haul of smuggled whisky was found along with two dead bodies. The coastguard has no idea who may have committed the murders but the whisky has been taken by the excise men.' An item further down, reported the discovery of the body of Jed Brooks, lanndlord of The Cannon Ball Inn, who had apparently hung himself without motive.

[17]***The Gang*** [Y10]

There was a group of lads outside the exchange shops at Oadby. They were all nutters. One day the big group of lads went into the video shop and nicked 2 boxes of cola bottles and called the shopkeeper a verbal name and ran off. The gang are the biggest around the area, their name is 'Bad Boyz". All of my mates hang around the group - that's why I have no friends to hang around with. What my friends did to get in the group was to get a Stanley knife and carved their skins 'FYS'. Then they had to beat up a boy of any age. All of my mates had done that and I think they have done wrong.

I have been asked by several members to join, so in the end I said "Yes". I had to join the group because I had no friends. I had to beat up a boy, he was 14, one year older than me. Then Leroy, the leader, he is the most important person. He is about 6ft 2 inches tall and very big built. He has all the top designer gear.

The next day was Saturday, Leroy said "OK, the easy part's over, it's time to engrave the initials FYS. I was really scared but I could not show I was scared, else I would have been thrown out of the group. So Leroy got his Stanly knife and started to do the F. It was so painful, it was like somebody inserting a needle into my arm. He finished. It look[ed] so good. I felt so good, really big. Leroy said "Instead of nicking them sweets you little t..t, buy some eggs and wait till Old Bill come and throw the eggs at them. I dare you to. If you do that dare, you will become second highest leader, OK?"

I thought "The second leader! What a privilege to be it." So

straightaway I said "Yes, OK, I will do it." So I went to the shop and said "Can I have six eggs please?"

The shopkeeper said "Certainly, sir."

Later that day I saw the police coming, so Leroy said "OK, Russell, go for it!"

The police officer got closer. I was bobbing my pants. He was getting closer, I had butterflies... that was it... he was in target range! I threw all 6 eggs and every one hit him. He looked up at me and said "OK< the joke has gone too far. If I catch you, you'll be nicked."

So I started sprinting home; he was right on my tail but as I got around the corner, I lost him, so I sprinted home. I ran through the door, striaght upstairs and into bed. I stayed in bed for a long time. I was really scared. So later on that night I heard some police sirens. I thought they were for me but luck[il]y enough they weren't. My legs were like jelly. I tried to stop thinking about it but I couldn't; so I went to sleep.

NEXT DAY

I got up and had a wash and got ready, then started walking down to the shops. As I walked into the shop, there was a sign saying 'HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BOY?' I couldn't believe my eyes - it was a picture of me! So quickly, I ran out of the shop and straight onto the park, thinking about the bad things I had done. I thought to myself 'If I had not listened to them silly prats, I would not be in this silly mess.'

Later that day, there was a knock at the door. I quickly ran to the window and had a look to see who it was. I couldn't believe it was the police. I heard the door open and a really deep voice said "Hello, Mrs Jones, sorry to bother you, but your son has committed a crime. He has been throwing eggs at me - I do not find it funny at all. So if I catch him breaking the law, he will be in so much trouble... all right?"

My mum shouted me down and said "What the hell do you think you are doing?"

I said "I'm very sorry and will not do it again."

"Right, Russell, you can go to bed and stay there for the rest of the day - and plus you're grounded for 2 weeks and no pocket money."

I thought to myself 'I will never do this again.'

[18]***The Haunted House*** [Y6]

It was night time in Scotland. On one of the islands in Scotland there is a haunted house. The flowers round it was dead. I always feel as if someone was watching me.

A flash of lightning struck just above the house. The house looked very scary.

I went inside. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling, pictures of vampires and ghosts hung on the walls. I felt as if a ghost was following me. I looked back, but all I could see was a bat, so I walked on.

I went down some stairs. I looked back but I didn't see anything.Then I heard something. It said "Ssshshsh!" I saw something move in the corner of my eye. I said "Who's there?" Then I heard "Whoowhoooo...". I said to myself 'There's a ghost in this house'. But I moved on.

I ran to the ghost. I said "Why were you following me?" and the ghost replied "We ghosts are supposed to haunt people."

"Now show me the way out and don't go scaring anybody!' I said.

"I won't."

"Good!"

I walked outside and said goodbye. I put a sign up that said 'Beware! Haunted House! Do not come here!'

The next day I came back to the house to look for more ghosts. I found three more. I gave the ghosts names: Billy, Fred, Barry, James, Lee. Now they are my friends and now they do shows around Scotland.

[19]***The Knight and the Mushroom*** [Y8]

The Knight slowly clambered over a fallen oak tree, its bark as black as oil, its leaves as brown as sand. The knight sat on the gigantic stump where the oak once stood, it was wet and shiny but would do for a short break. He tied his horse around a nearby birch and sat back down on the stump. The forest by night was very creepy. Branches stooped over like hands trying to grasp passers by, putting the fear of God into them.

It was autumn on the cube world and the leaves were a multitude of colours ranging from green to brown, with many shades of reds and golds between. The multitude of colours still did not take away the creepiness of the forest mingled with the night, and the white moonlight hiding behind the clouds.

As the horse moved a little, the Knight heard the crunch of leaves under its hooves. In the middle of the area where the tree had fallen, two mushrooms had grown through - normal white mushrooms, which the knight had seen before with witches. This concluded his theory that they might be safe to eat.

The knight walked towards the two mushrooms, hearing the final screams of the leaves beneath his feet. He bent down slowly, determined not to pull a muscle in his back. When he'd bent down far enough, he grabbed one mushroom by its supporting stalk. The mushroom came out with no problems at all. He put it in his pouch and grabbed the other mushroom. He pulled hard. Nothing happened. The mushroom stood tall and proud. He grabbed his pick axe from his belt and chipped stone away from around the mushroom. The knight pulled again, the mushroom stood still.

The knight sat back down on the stump and started throwing stones at the mushroom. The first stone bounced wide. The second skimmed the mushroom. The third, however, hit the mushroom with force.
"Ouch!" a sound came.
The knight sharply jumped up and looked around with his beady white eyes for the cause of the noise. There was no sign of anything nearby. The knight turned around and continued to throw stones at the mushroom. He hit the mushroom again.
"Ouch!"
This time, the knight sood up and had a wander around to see what was making the noise.
"Who's out there? Is anybody there?"
The knight's frustrated voice was met with the silence of the night. Again he sat down and threw more stones. He hit the mushroom again.
"Ouch!"
The knight realised that the noise was coming from the mushroom. Curiously, he walked over to the mushroom, The knight bent down to the mushroom. He extended his right hand and slapped the mushroom.
"Ow! What did you do that for?"
The mushroom's voice was high pitched and anger was in its voice.
"Oh my God!"
The knight was shocked.
"Don't take that attitude," said the mushroom fairly loudly.
"What are you?" said the knight, calming down.
"I am Terrypolinich, but you can call me Terry," said the mushroom, also calming down.
The mushroom asked a question: "I can sense people's memories... what are you doing here?"
"I've been banished from my castle. I want to find a place to stay. Will you help me?"
The knight could not believe that he was asking the mushroom a question.
"As long as you don't eat me," the mushroom said.
"I promise," said the knight.
"OK," the mushroom said.
The mushroom jumped out of the hole.The knight opened his satchel and the mushroom jumped in.

[20]***The Last Minute*** [Y6]

McLeish had always wanted to be a famous footballer and now he was 15 he could be one. So McLeish's dad joined him up with a football club for his 15th birthday. McLeish went along to training and really enjoyed himself. He went every weekend and made friends with someone called Hugh Mitchell, a keen footballer who had been playing football for four years. After a couple of months McLeish got the position of first reserve.

"Well done, mate!" shouted Hugh as they came off the field.

The day soon came for the big match. The whole team gathered around the spotless white van.

"Right," called the driver, "in you hop!"

There was a few minutes of "Oy, that's mine" and "Get out of my

seat!" and "Move up!" but then everyone was ready to go.

When they arrived they were shown their way to the changing rooms and left to it. They were soon on the pitch and ready to go. Although McLeish wasn't playing, he still felt nervous. The whistle blew and the feet moved, they went up and down, up and down. The other team scored twice in ten minutes. Then one of McLeish's team mates sprained his ankle, so of course McLeish got called on.

McLeish scored two fantastic goals. There was one minute left and McLeish had the ball. He whizzed past the other team and shot an amazing goal.

"HOORAY!" the supporters yelled, leaping to their feet.

"WELL DONE!" yelled his team.

The next day McLeish's face was in *The Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph* and *Today*. - and that's how McLeish became a famous footballer.

[21]***The Night We went to the Haunted Bridge*** [Y10]
There were lots of strange things happening that night. I was staying around my friend's house that night and her parents were away for the weekend. So there wasn't any adults around. Before I went around her house, she said that when she went out, she left the dog in with the back door locked, the windows shut and the lights out. But when she got back, everything was not how it was left. The dog was out with the back door open and the lights were on. But there was no-one else with a key to the house!

Later on that night, Dene, Sarah, Simon, Danny, Darren came down my house for a bit, then we all went round Sarah's. When we got round Sarah's we was talking for a bit, and then some more friends came around. When it came about 12.30 am. we started to talk about the bridge which is supposed to be haunted. But it wasn't actually a dare, we was just saying "Shall we go down?"

First of all the lads didn't want to go but we persuaded them to go. At about 01.15 am. me, Sarah, Dene, Darren and Simon got into Dene's car. On the way, we was talking about what things happen down at the bridge. While we was talking I was getting funny pains in my stomach.

It was quite a cold night, so there was condensation on the car. First of all we got some petrol. When we got to the bridge we turned the car round. You have to park the car so the bonnet is just sticking out, and the rest of the car is under the bridge and one side is next to the wall. You also have to open all the windows about two or three inches, turn all the music off, and you have to sit there all silent. Sarah and me kept asking what happens and things like that.

Dene said "First of all, you hear rattling of chains or creaking of rope - and that's the sound of the rope that this man hung himself with. Then you hear drips of water - that's dripping of blood. Then you hear a big bang on the back of the car, where his body's been cut down - or you see a black figure behind the car."

We waited for a bit, then we started hearing things. First we heard chains rattling and creaking and dripping of water. Then we heard footsteps down the road but there was no-one there. Then there was the sound of like a key going down the car. Then we all went very cold and Dene and Darren said they could feel someone grabbing their arm. Then all of a sudden Dene drove off.Then we pulled up somewhere and his petrol cap had gone and there was all fingerprints on the car. We were all very shocked.

[22]***The Picnic*** [Y10]

Their father threw out the tartan blanket to provide seating as two small children struggled to escape from their seat belts. Just as the blanket settled on the moss it was quickly displaced by two sliding pairs of trainers. There was a struggle, a flurry of arms and legs and a squeak as the rug was disentangled.

A large picnic hamper was unloaded from the boot. Half dragged, half carried across the glade's sunlit floor, it was placed on the crumpled rug watched by gluttonous eyes. The fraying wicker lid was lifted and laid down to one side as a marvellous feast was revealed. All colours shone like a rainbow from the foil wrappers which reflected the forest scenes in crumpled misconceptions.

The feast was observed for a moment then with unselected movements foil packages were chosen, opened, looked upon and devoured - the picnic creating appetites needed to sustain the excitement.

The excitement passed, creating drowsiness and food induced bloatedness, encouraging them to sleep. They lay back onto the soft grass which, sculpting itself round the curvature of their slumbering bodies, began rising and falling in accordance with their breathing.

Leaping over an abundance of nettles, fed up with listening to the breathing of his father and smaller brother, the older child found himself on a path, a slim tre lined avenue. Cautiously, aware of the observing eyes and muffled scratching, the explorer moved on, the dense foliage descending about him, forcing him to push through immovable thorns and lashing branches.

Whilst searching for a vantage point, the top of an ageing tree was deemed sufficient. Scrambling to the first branch, acquiring lacerations to his legs, he viewed the horizon - a sea of emerald green, glistening in the pale sunshine like a calm turquoise saline surrounding an island resting in the tropics. Remembering the serene vision intently, he dismounted the tree, landing expertly, knees bent, with the precision of an Amazon tribesman.

Glancing around, he observed the forest was not unlike a jungle. The brambles wove themselves through lichened trunks entwining the branches and mingling with the ferns at the base of trees. Common birds' dull plumage if watched carefully, obtained sleek, glistening outlines like those of paradise birds and parrots. Tiny bundles of moss blending into the lofty boughs, created images of tree frogs, almost fluorescent in colour with smooth, silk-like skin and tiny, spread out rubbery feet.

Rustling among the straggly weeds and spreading ferns caused alarm. Ripples created in the leaves traced a path which closed like a secret door in an ancient pyramid immediately after the wave occurred. Images of lethal snakes metres long and razor toothed serpents unnerved him and taking a step back he began to edge away cautiously - unknowingly into the roots of an unnoticed tree. Stumbling back, he fell and lay sobbing with laboured breath in this set of twisting fibres embedded into the dark, grainy soil.

Lonely and forlorn, curled up as if to protect straying limbs, he cowered into a huddle in a cove in the tree over which he had fallen. Feeling alone and tired he watched as dusk fell and sat still, threatened by the looming darkness, knowing the menace of the impending black.

Standing, he started to wander, lurching and twisting suddenly at the murmurs of beasts amongst the trees. Turning wide-eyed, trying to focus in the pitch, his eye was caught during the lash of a stray twig causing it to burn intensely. Water, attempting to cool the sting, flowed freely, welling up amongst his lashes and cascading down his reddened face over the ridges of his cheeks onto his lips, wetting them, slightly encouraging his thirst.

As he continued to meander, staggering slowly, the pain in his eye became a sullen throb and his thirst a dull ache in his chest. Struggling to fight fatigue, his lids began to droop, causing him to stumble [and] losing his balance, he fell slowly into the depths of a marsh. The soft, liquid mud slid through childish hands and engulfed his short, rotund arms and torso.
the quagmire began to ebb in time with his breathing, as he had seen the soft grass expanding with the slumbering of his father and small brother hours before. The mud slowly rising caused the boy to cry. The cry dwindled into small gasps and was smothered by the lapping mud.

Teacher's comment
What a chilling story. The impact is amazing - it's frightening. I think the way you established the tension between curiosity and danger was marvellous, and I also liked the disturbing contrast between the normality of the family outing and the ending. It doesn't bear thinking about.

(Watch punctuation, at times it lets you down)

[23]***The Pool That's Open to the Big Sea*** [Y6]
I brought Mikki, Keiea and Shanon to the blue pool. And when they got changed, one of them went in with her knickers and vest. They jumped in with a splash. The lifeguard told the girls they have to stay in the shallow end - and "Do not go down to the deep end!"

Shannon jumped in and ignored the lifeguard and went straight down to the deep end. While she was underwater, she saw a hole in the deep end. Shanon swam under the hole. It opened up to a big open sea. She was shocked and scared; she was frightened.

She was getting out into the sea and then suddenly she saw a giant fish. She tried to swim back but the water was carrying her further away.

"Go back and look after your friends!"

The weight of the fish broke me [her?] into bits and they never saw them again.

The moral of this story is 'Do as you are told.'

[24]***The Runaway Tiger*** [Y4]

At the Zoo one day, a man who works there was showing the people all of the animals.

As he got to the tiger, something serious happened.The tiger jumped over the fence and made everybody scream when it was running away.

The man who works there was so angry that his face went red hot because he couldn't finish showing the people the Animals. He was running after him shouting "Come back! Come back!"

When he was in the woods chasing him, some other men heard about the escaping tiger so they took their nets to try and catch it. They went to some woods to find him.

They suddenly heard something running, it was the tiger and the man running after it. They helped him catch it. One of them caught him by surprise and got him by the head and dragged him all the way to the zoo.

Then he was happy because he can work there again.

[25]***The Secret Island Castle*** [Y6]

Tom went to the beach for his holiday and was walking around. He sat down by a hill of sand and watched children playing. Tom punched the sand and it fell down. There was a castle and Tom went closer to it. There was a drawbridge and Tom could see inside the castle.

There was gold inside. Tom didn't know what to do. He crept up to the drawbridge, then it shut up. Tom fell backwards - he couldn't believe it. He walked away. Then the drawbridge opened up again. Tom ran back to the beach to his Mum who was lying down.

A couple of days later, Tom told Robert about the castle. Robert didn't believe him but tom persuaded him to come and see. Tom went through the hill with Robert. Tom pointed out the castle. There was gold inside. Robert ran towards the castle.

Tom shouted "Stop!"

The drawbridge shut up and Tom just missed the water.

Robert said "How are we supposed to get inside?"

"I don't know," said Tom.

Robert then had an idea. He ran back through the hill. Two minutes later, he came back with swimming trunks on. He dived in. The drawbridge was still open and Robert climbed in. He asked Tom to come with him but Robert stayed.

Ten minutes later, Robert came back. He just said "There's lots of gold in there, Tom, come in!"

Then the drawbridge was moving up. Tom shouted because robert was still in there. The drawbridge was down [again] but Robert wasn't there. Then suddenly Robert popped up from the water.

"I thought you were still in the castle," said Tom.

"I was, but I jumped in the water," said Robert.

The drawbridge moved up and didn't come down.

When they went home, Robert found a note on his bed. It said 'Dear Robert, You were clever getting into the castle and Tom was smart finding it. I give you and Tom this piece of treasure each, to keep.'

Tom ran upstairs [and] Robert showed him the letter.

"Who wrote the letter?" said Tom.

"I don't know," Robert said.

[26]***The Secret of Adventure Island*** [Y6]

One sunny day, I was walking along, looking forward to going to Portugal tomorrow with my Mum and Dad. I got up early next morning to catch the ship. We caught the ship just in time.

We were sailing along, then next thing I was unconscious. When I first opened my eyes, my eyes felt like lead. I looked around and in front of me was a jungle. Then suddenly I heard this voice saying "Ha, ha, ha! Soon this whole rain forest will be mine, all mine! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

I followed him to this building, I followed him in. Then suddenly he turned around as if he knew I was following him. Then he shouted "Get him!" He raised the alarm - I ran for all I was worth but it was no good. He has about 15 guards and he soon caught me. He had my Mum and Dad and all the other passengers.

Just then, I kicked him in the shins and then I got a gun. I said "Hands up!" I was a gun that makes you go to sleep. I shot him and the guards.

I freed the passengers and we ran for our lives. We used their phone and we dialled 999 and in a matter of minutes the police came. They arrested the thieves and we were safe - even though it was a close shave!

[27]***Time Travel*** [Y6]

"... and here is our most valuable piece of science, a time machine."

For the first time, Laurie glanced up. He was in the bristol Science Museum, which is built on an old Victorian railway site and has two floors. He had thought it would be so interesting but it had turned out to be as boring as boring can be. But now he'd heard something interesting - a time machine!

The guard finished his memorised chatter and moved on but Laurie stayed put. He wanted to find out more about this time machine.He slowly walked towards it, wary at first - then pulled the air compressed door and went in. Inside there was a cushioned bench which he sat down on.There were so many buttons waiting to be pushed and on his right a lever with a handle.

"Hm, this looks interesting," he thought. He pulled it and before he knew what happened, the whole thing was shaking and rumbling. Suddenly he shot up, up - so far that he felt a ginormous **CRASH!** "Oh no, I've gone through the roof!" he yelled. He looked around until he saw the year set. "Oh my God..." It was set for the year 2179!!!!!

Laurie passed out.

When Laurie came to, he came to the conclusion that he'd stopped. "Well, here we go..." he carefully opened the door. He was in a big warehouse with, from what he could see, crates and jars all ready to be loaded. Then the door opened and four lorries drove in. Strange men got out.
"Hey, what's that over there?" said one.

"Don't know, looks like some sort of flying machine, let's go and have a look," said another.

They began walking slowly towards Laurie.
Laurie panicked. "AHHHHHH!" Laurie screamed. He jumped back into the time machine and began fiddling with the time button. Meanwhile, the men were coming closer and closer.

"Got it!"

The machine jolted and sprang into life. Whzzzzzzz....

"Ah," Laurie breathed a sigh of relief. He slowly got out and rejoined the group. But when his Mum asked him what happened, he just said "Nothing."

[28]***Tom at Terror Towers*** [Y3]

Once upon a time there was a nine year old boy called Tom. He and his Mum always argued. One day his mum made him so angry he ran away.

He ran through a spooky forest. He felt scared, so he ran through the forest until he got to a broken down castle. It was a spooky castle but he decided to explore it.

He ran over the creaky drawbridge and opened the big wooden door.The inside seemed worse than outside. There was cobwebs everywhere. In front there was a staircase. Tom decided to go up the staircase. At the top was a door, he went in the door.

Tom screamed! There was a ghost!

Tom ran out of [the] door, down the staircase, out of the big door, along the drawbridge, through the forest and back home.

"Sorry, Mum" said Tom.
"That's all right," said Tom's Mum.

[29]***Tonsilitis attack*** [Y8]

I awakened with a nurse by my side. She told me that I was not to eat or drink anything because I was having my operation in the evening. The operation was to have my tonsils out and I wasn't feeling too brave about going. She also told me that my mum had gone home and that she will be back at 10.00 am.

The time came, my mum was there. The nurse came over to me and kept hitting my hand trying to find my vein. She found the vein and put a blob of cream on it; she also put some clear tape. I gathered that's where she would put the needle when I go down to theatre.

The nurse told me to put my head back and try and relax. Hours had passed and the nurse woke me up to tell me I was going down to theatre - laid on my back, watching the lights flash past. The last thing I can remember is the injection going into my arm and then counting 1,2,3 up my arm.

I awakened after 24 hours and I couldn't talk. My throat was really sore and it didn't feel like anything was missing. Before I went down the nurse said that I might have to have gromits. I was relieved, because I really liked swimming and if I had gromits, I would have had to wear a swimming hat.

Then the next day came [and] I went home. I still couldn't talk very well but I was glad to be in my own bed.

[30]***What It's Like To Win The Lottery*** [Y6]

On the outskirts of London, not too far away, stood a wood called Humpy. In the middle of this wood stood the cottage of Firtree, which was the household of the Hodgeons. It wasn't really a 100% cottage, nor was it very nice to live in. The paint was peeling, tiles were missing off the roof, the chimney was bent, the windows were broken and the lawn hadn't been cut for years.

The family that lived in the house consisted of three people: Mum, the cheerful housewife, Dad, the droop, and little George, the only down to earth person out of all of them. Mum was the cheerful soul, running the house like a machine, washing clothes in the well, cooking bits of food they had - and whatever condition they were in, she'd always look on the bright side of life.

Dad, the droop of the family, spent all day in a chair, with his eyes

glued to a portrait of his father, which hung above the fireplace. Dad also had this big frown on his face. All the time it was there. Even when they were happy, he'd be the opposite of smiling. The frown stuck to him like an insect sticks to sap.

'Darling Georgie', as his mother called him, was the only sane person in this house. Every night he prayed before going to bed, that his dreams would come true - and that was to have a better life.

The only thing that this strange family has in common with each other, is that they're all poor - but they all save up for something. Something big. And that was the lottery. Every night, this family emptied the pockets for any petty cash to go in the savings box. Dad had a small job in a book publisher's factory, packing all the books in boxes to be delivered to the shops. But a book packer doesn't get paid much.

Eventually, the family saved £1.00, enough to buy a lottery ticket. Dad went up to the village to buy it from the retailer. Mum very carefully put it behind the clock on the mantlepiece. Finally, Saturday arrived and the family watched the draw on the pub television.

"And the first ball," said Gordon Kennedy, "is number 6."

"Ooh! We've got that one!" said Mum.

"And that one," when the second had been drawn.

"And that one, and that one, and that one. Oh, please, let's get the sixth ball... Yyyyes!" cried Mum. "We've won! Oh, ten million pounds! Hooray!"

Mum grabbed George's arms and the two started dancing around. Dad took a little flag out of his pocket and said droopily "I'm happy. Hooray."

The next day, the family bought a great big manor in Central London. Then they went shopping. They bought video games, dresses, a Rolls Royce, a TV and much, much more. At the end of the day, they settled comfortably down in the silk beds.

Suddenly, there was a loud knock on the door. Mum got up sleepily and opened it....